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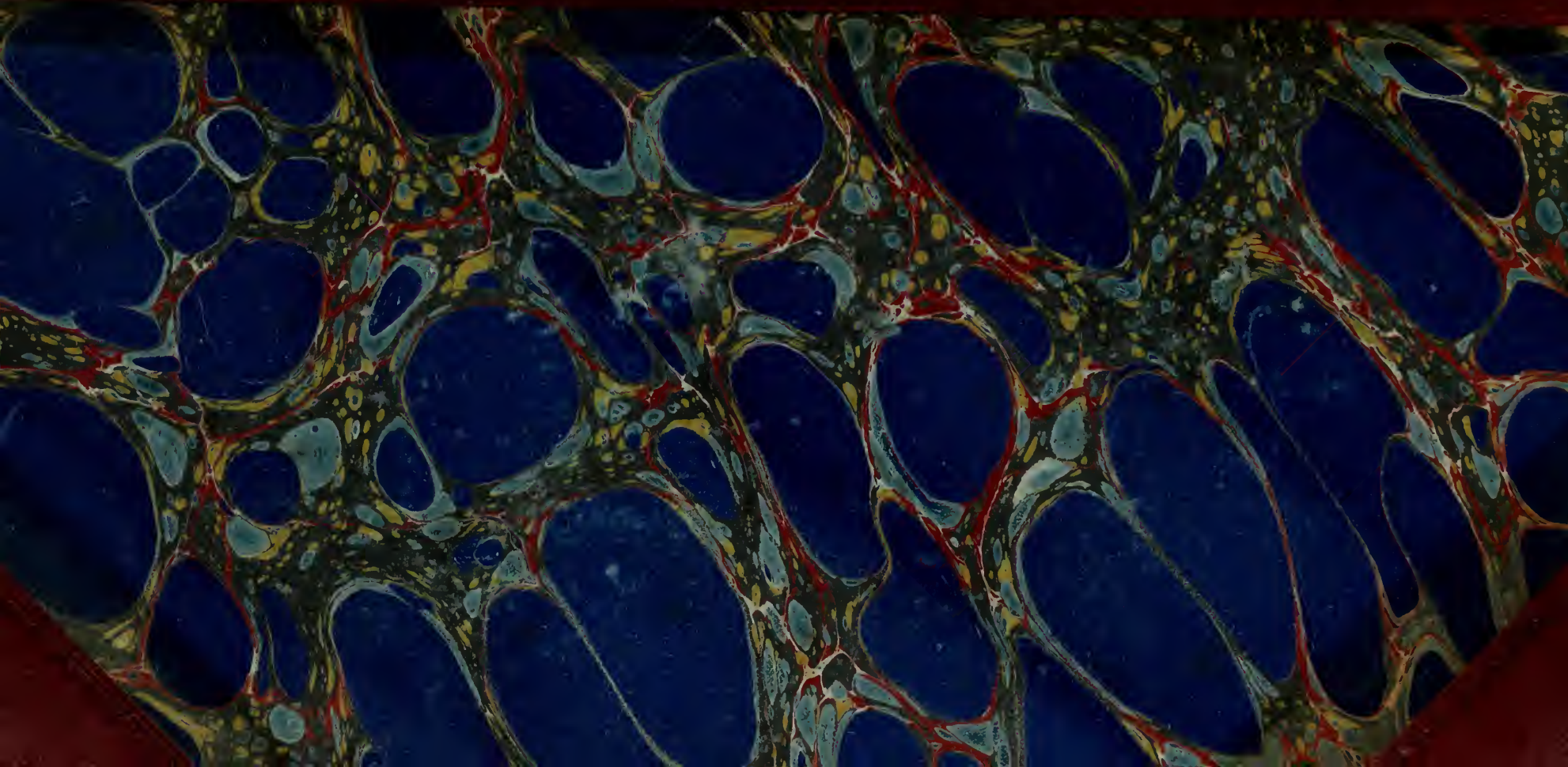

A. HOPKINS. J. SWAIN.

UNDERNEATH THE YEW-TREE.

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD.

VOLUME XVIII.

July to December, 1874.

RICHARD BENTLEY & SON,
8, NEW BURLINGTON STREET, LONDON, W.
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty.

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By M. ELLEN EDWARDS.

At Chamouni.

THE ARGOSY.

JULY 1, 1874.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

CHAPTER XXI.

GENERAL ST. GEORGE.

GENERAL ST. GEORGE'S departure from India had been accelerated by a slight attack of fever, which so far prostrated him that he was unable to write, or communicate in any way to his friends in England the fact that he was starting for home two months before the date previously fixed on by himself. As a consequence, the letters and newspapers addressed to him, which contained the account of his nephew Lionel Dering's arrest and commitment for wilful murder, crossed him on the voyage, and he landed at Marseilles in happy ignorance of the whole affair.

His health had benefited greatly by the voyage, and he determined to strengthen it still further by lingering for a few weeks in the south of France before venturing to encounter the more variable and trying climate of his own country. It was while thus enjoying himself that the letters and papers sent back from India reached him. It was a terrible shock to the old soldier to read the news told therein. In his secret heart he had come to look upon Lionel with all the affection and yearning which he might have bestowed on a son.

Without the loss of a moment he started for Paris, en route for London.

But by the time he reached Paris he was so ill again that the doctor whom he called in ordered him at once to bed, and utterly forbade him ever to think of venturing any further on his journey for at least a fortnight to come. In this dilemma he telegraphed to Mr. Perrins, the family lawyer. That gentleman was by the old soldier's bedside in less than twenty-four hours afterwards.

Mr. Perrins brought with him the startling news of Lionel's escape from prison; but beyond the bare facts of the affair as detailed in the newspapers he knew nothing. With those bare facts the General was obliged to content himself for some time to come. He watched the newspapers from day to day with feverish anxiety, dreading each morning to find in them the news of Lionel's recapture. But when a month had passed away, and the subject had begun to die out of people's minds in the rush of newer interests, he took heart of grace and wrote to Perrins again, begging of him to go down to Duxley, and there ascertain, by cautious inquiries and the free use of his purse, whether it were not possible to obtain some clue, however faint, to Lionel's whereabouts.

Mr. Hoskyns was the first person on whom Mr. Perrins called when he found himself at Duxley; but that gentleman professed to know very little more than was known to the public at large. Nor, in fact, did he. The annoyance he had felt at the time at having been so cleverly impersonated, and the trouble he had been put to to prove his non-complicity in the escapade, had soon been forgotten. He had learned to like and esteem Lionel as much as it was possible for him to like and esteem anyone, and he was genuinely glad that he had escaped from prison. But it was no part of his business to pry into the details of the affair, nor did he ever attempt to do so; neither did Lionel nor Tom see any adequate motive for laying on his shoulders the burden of a secret which he could in no wise help to lighten for them.

Thus it fell out that he had nothing to tell Perrins. But he did the wisest thing that could be done under the circumstances: he took him straight to Tom Bristow, introduced him to that gentleman, and then left the two together.

This first interview between Mr. Perrins and Tom took place during the time that Lionel was lying perdu at Pincote. Not till he had fully satisfied himself as to the lawyer's identity, and had consulted with Lionel, would Tom say a word either one way or another. So Mr. Perrins stayed all night in Duxley, and saw Tom the following morning; but, even then, the information which he took back with him for the behoof of General St. George was of the scantiest. Still, as far as it went, it was eminently satisfactory. Lionel was well and safe. He sent his love and regards to his uncle, and begged of him to wait a little while longer and then everything should be told him.

The General had not long to wait. Within a fortnight of the time that Mr. Perrins had communicated to him the result of his mission, Mr. Tom Bristow was ushered into the sitting-room of his hotel in Paris. Tom was the bearer of a letter of introduction from Lionel, which spoke of him and his services in such terms that the old soldier's heart warmed to him in a moment. Then Tom told him everything: the story of the murder; the imprisonment; the marriage; the trial

and the escape ; and finished by telling him how Lionel, under the name of the Rev. Horace Brown, was at that moment hidden safely away among the Cumberland hills.

The old soldier listened to the narrative in open-mouthed wonder. To him it was like a story out of the "Arabian Nights"—a veritable chapter of romance.

He thanked Tom Bristow over and over again, in his warm-hearted, impulsive way, for the services he had rendered his dear boy.

"But we have now to consider the future," said Tom when he had brought his narrative up to date.

"Ay; just so. But what about the future?" asked General St. George, with a puzzled look.

"Simply this," answered Tom. "As matters stand at present, Dering's life is one of perpetual dread and uncertainty. He never feels sure from day to day that before nightfall his hiding-place may not be discovered, or his disguise penetrated, and he himself taken into custody as an escaped murderer. Such a life, in time, would become utterly unbearable—would, in fact, be enough to drive a man insane,or to give himself up to the police in utter despair."

"I see it all. Poor boy! poor boy!"

"It would, therefore, seem that, in order to escape so wretched a fate, only one course is left open to Dering : and that is, to put the width of the ocean between himself and his pursuers. The width of half a world if possible."

"I should go with him wherever he went," said the General with a tear in the corner of his eye. "I could not bear to let him go again."

"In some remote nook of the New World, where the nearest city is a hundred miles away, with his wife on one hand and you on the other to love and care for him, Lionel Dering, like a storm-tossed ship that has reached a happy haven at last, might live out the remainder of his days in quiet happiness ; without any haunting dread that his past life would ever become known, or that he would ever be touched on the shoulder by any other hand than that of a friend."

"Yes—yes ; living out in the bush, or something of that kind, is what you mean," said the old soldier, excitedly. "I've camped out in the jungle many a time, and know what it is. It's not such a bad sort of life when you get used to it. Why not get Li to sail next week? I'm an old campaigner, and could have my rattletraps ready in a few hours."

"But to go away thus," resumed Tom, "with the red stain of murder clinging to his name ; with the foul conspiracy to destroy him still unravelled ; with his wrongs unavenged ; is what Lionel Dering will never consent to do. And I confess that, were I in his place, my feelings in the matter would be very similar to his. He has set before himself one great object in life, and he will never rest till he has

accomplished it. And that is—to track out and bring to punishment the real murderer of Percy Osmond."

"But—but what can he do?" faltered the General. "It seems to m ethat his predicament is such that he is quite powerless to help himself, or to take any action whatever in his own interests."

"At the first glance it would naturally seem so," said Tom. "But some of the difficulties which surround his case, as it stands at present, may, perhaps, be got over by a little ingenuity. I am going to put before you a certain scheme which may, or may not, meet with your approbation. Should you not approve of it, it will have to be at once abandoned, as it will be impossible to carry it out without your active help and co-operation."

"My dear Mr. Bristow, you have told me enough this morning to induce me to promise beforehand that any scheme you may put before me, which has for its basis the welfare of Lionel, will meet with my heartiest support. No man could have proved himself a better friend to my dear boy than you have done. Your wishes are my law."

After satisfying himself that there were no eavesdroppers about, Tom proceeded to lay before General St. George the details of a scheme which he had been elaborating in his brain for several days, and which, in outline, had been already agreed to by Lionel.

When Tom ceased speaking, the old soldier mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. He was hot and nervous with excitement. "Your scheme is certainly a most extraordinary one," he said; "but I have faith in your ability to carry it out. I need hardly say that you may depend upon my doing my best in every way to second your designs."

Tom stayed and dined with the General, and went back to London by the night mail.

One result of the interview was that the General decided on not returning to England for some time to come. Lionel and his wife were to join him in a little while at some place on the Continent, not yet fixed upon. Meantime, he would rest quietly in Paris, and there await further instructions from Tom.

The General had obtained Kester St. George's address from Mr. Perrins, and about a week after Tom's visit he wrote to his nephew, telling him where he was, and asking him to go over and see him in Paris. The invitation was one which Kester obeyed with alacrity. He had always held firmly to the belief that his Uncle Arthur was a comparatively rich man. Now that Lionel was out of the way, and with so terrible an accusation still hanging over him, what more natural or likely than that he should replace Lionel in his uncle's affections: and have his own name substituted in place of that of his cousin in his uncle's will?

Kester flung black care to the winds as he climbed the staircase that

led to his uncle's apartments in Paris. He put on his most winning smile, his most genial manner, as another man might pull on a pair of easy-fitting gloves. A servant opened the door: and——there was his uncle seated in an invalid chair at the far end of the room.

Kester sprang forward. "My dear uncle——" he began: and then he stopped. There was something in the eyes of the old soldier that chilled his enthusiasm in a moment.

The General extended two lean, frigid fingers, and motioned to him to sit down. "Pray be seated," he said. "I am not well, and I hate scenes." Kester sat down without a word.

General St. George, after deliberately rubbing his spectacles with his handkerchief, placed them across his nose, and proceeded to take a steady survey of his nephew.

Kester fidgeted a little under the ordeal, but smiled and tried to appear pleased.

"You don't look so young as when I saw you last," said his uncle.

"Eight years make a difference in the appearance of most men," said Kester, "and London life is very wearing."

"No doubt it is," said the veteran, drily. "But that any absolute necessity exists for you to live in London is more than I was aware of before."

"No absolute necessity, perhaps, does exist. Yet I confess that, except by way of a brief change now and again, life to me anywhere else would soon become unendurable."

"You look prematurely old, sir—prematurely old," said the General severely. His spectacles were across his nose again by this time, and he was again looking Kester steadily in the face. And now he spoke in a voice that was low, stern, and impressive. "You look as if you had a burden on your mind: you look as if you had some secret care that was eating away your very life. Kester St. George, you are an unhappy man!"

Kester's colour came and went. A shiver ran through him from head to foot. He pressed one hand for a moment across his eyes. Then he laughed a forced, hollow laugh.

"Really, sir, you are rather hard on me," he said. "After not seeing you for eight years, this is scarcely the greeting I anticipated from you. You have called me an unhappy man. Granting that I am one, am I any exception to the ordinary run of my fellow mortals? Show me the man who is really happy—who has no skeleton locked up in the secret closet of his heart!"

"Kester St. George, what have you done with your cousin, Lionel Dering?"

Kester started to his feet, his eyes staring, his hands trembling. A spasm, that was gone almost before it had come, contorted his face for a moment strangely.

"Before heaven, General St. George, I don't know what you are driving at!" he cried, in tones that were husky from excitement. "I am not my cousin's keeper, that you should ask me what I have done with him."

"Then it was not you who assisted him to escape from prison?"

"I! No—certainly not."

"And yet I said it could be no one but you," said the General, half sadly. "And you don't know what has become of him? You cannot tell me where to find him now?"

"I have no more knowledge of my cousin's whereabouts than you have, sir."

"How I have been mistaken! When I read the account of Lionel's extraordinary escape, I said to myself, This is Kester's doing. Kester knew that his cousin was innocent, and it is he who has helped him to escape."

"You honoured me in your thoughts far more highly than I deserved. I stated all along my belief in my cousin's innocence, but I had certainly no hand in planning his escape."

"But, at all events, you saw him frequently while he was in prison? You were there as his friend, helper, and adviser? How did he bear his imprisonment? Did he speak of me?"

Again Kester's colour came and went. "I never saw my cousin while he was in prison," he said, in a low voice. "I was suffering severely from illness during the whole time. I was confined to my own rooms, and forbidden to stir out of doors on any account."

"You were well enough, sir, to find your way to your club within a week of the date of your cousin's trial. You were not too ill to play whist with Colonel Lexington, and win fifty guineas from that gentleman by betting on the odd trick. You were not afraid of walking home afterwards through the cold streets with a cigar in your mouth." All this had been told General St. George by Colonel Lexington himself—an old military friend, who had called upon him two or three days previously.

Kester St. George glared at his uncle as if he would gladly have annihilated him. But the old soldier gave him back look for look, and the younger man's eyes quickly fell. With a muttered curse, he pushed aside his chair, and strode to the window. Then he turned.

"General St. George, I will be frank with you," he said. "There was never any love lost between Lionel Dering and myself. However deeply shocked I might be that such a foul crime should be laid to his charge, however strong might be my belief in his innocence, I could not—no, I could not—go near him when he lay in prison. He wanted no help or advice from me. He would not have thanked me for prof-

fering them. I would not play the hypocrite's part, and I did not go near him."

"Your candour is really refreshing," answered the General. "Since you have no tidings to give me of my nephew, I am sorry to have brought you so far from home. If you will accept this little cheque in payment of your expenses, I shall esteem it a favour."

Kester came a step or two nearer and held out his hands appealingly. "Uncle—are we to part in this way?" he said, not without a ring of pathos in his voice.

"And why should we not part in this way, Mr. St. George?"

"I know, sir, that I was never a favourite with you," answered Kester, bitterly. "I know that I can never hope to stand as high in your regards as my cousin Lionel stood; but I did not know till this moment that I should ever be insulted by an offer such as the one you have just made me. I did not know till now that I should be dismissed like the veriest stranger that ever crossed your threshold!"

Not a muscle of General St. George's face stirred in answer to this appeal: the hard, cold light in his eyes never wavered for a moment. He distrusted his nephew thoroughly, and he dealt with him as he would have dealt with a wily Asiatic.

"If you feel that my offer of a cheque is an insult," he said, "I retract the insult by replacing the cheque in my pocket. As regards treating you like a stranger, I have no intention of doing that, although I might just remind you that you and I are, in fact, very little more than strangers to each other: still, I do not forget that you are my nephew. I asked you to come and see me, in the expectation that you would be able to give me some tidings of Lionel Dering, just as I should have sent for Lionel Dering in the expectation that he would have been able to give me some tidings of you, had your position and his been reversed. You have not been able to give me the news I wanted, why then need I detain you here? Are you anxious to become a hanger-on to a querulous invalid? No, Kester St. George, that is not the kind of life that would suit you—or me either. Stay in Paris or go back to London, as may please you best. When I want you again, I will send for you. Meanwhile you may rest fully assured that I shall not forget you."

"I suppose it must be as you wish, sir," said Kester, humbly. "May I ask whether it is your intention to make any very long stay in Paris?"

"If my strength increases as it has done during the last few days, I shall not stay here more than another fortnight at the most."

"When we get you back again in England, sir, I trust there will be no objection to my calling on you rather oftener than I shall be able to do while you stay abroad."

"My doctor tells me that I must not think of crossing the Channel

before next summer. I shall winter either in the south of France or in Italy. Probably in the latter, if I can find a place to suit me. I shall not be alone. Richard Dering, Lionel's brother, is ordered to Europe for his health, and will join me through the winter. He has been with me in India, and understands my crotchety ways and queer temper."

Not without a bitter pang did Kester St. George hear this announcement. Hardly was one brother disposed of when another sprang up in his place. But he hid his disappointment under an admirable assumption of mingled affection and respect.

"At least, sir, there can be no objection to my having your address," he said, "when you are finally settled for the winter."

"None whatever—none whatever," answered the General.

"And should my vagrant footsteps lead me anywhere into your neighbourhood—although I don't think it at all likely that they will do so—and should I chance to drop in upon you about luncheon-time, I presume I should not be looked upon as an intruder?"

"Certainly not as an intruder. In fact, it was my intention to send for you before long, and ask you to stay with me. But not while my health is so bad. At present I am too nervous and out of sorts for company of any kind." This was said with more kindness of tone than the General had yet used in speaking to his nephew, but at the same time it was a plain intimation that their interview was at an end. Kester rose at once and took his leave.

"That fellow's an arrant scamp, although he is my nephew," muttered the General to himself, as the door closed behind Kester. "He's no real St. George. There's a drop of sinister blood somewhere in his veins that has proved foul enough to poison the whole. Of course, I knew when I sent for him that he had nothing to tell me about Lionel, but I wanted to see him and talk with him. I wanted to ascertain whether the impression that I formed of him when I was in England several years ago would be borne out by the impression I should form of him now. It has been borne out most fully. The Kester St. George of to-day, with his scheming brain and shallow heart, is precisely the Kester St. George of ten years ago, only with more experience and knowledge of the world's hard ways. Could we but wring the truth out of that crafty heart of his, I wonder whether one would find there the secret of a certain terrible crime? But I have no right to accuse him even in thought; and Heaven, in its own good time, will surely bring the truth to light."

CHAPTER XXII.

CUPID AT PINCOTE.

With the departure of Lionel Dering from Pincote in disguise, and the subsequent removal of Edith and Mrs. Garside to London, it would naturally have been thought that Mr. Tom Bristow's business in Duxley was at an end, that he would have bidden the quiet little country town a long farewell, and have hastened back gladly to the busier haunts of men. But such was not the case. He still kept on his lodgings in Duxley. Although he had given notice to leave them three or four times, when the day came for him to go he had always renewed his tenancy for another short term; and he still lingered on in a vague, purposeless sort of way, altogether unusual in one who rather prided himself on his decisive and business-like mode of conducting all the affairs of his every day life.

Truth to tell, he could not make up his mind to sever the thread of connection which bound him to Miss Culpepper; which, frail though it might be, still continued to hold together; and would, in all probability, so hold as long as he chose to remain at Duxley, but which must inevitably be broken for ever the moment he and his portmanteau bade a final farewell to the pleasant little town. And yet, what folly, what wild infatuation, it was, as he said to himself a score of times a day. There was not the remotest prospect of his being able to win Jane Culpepper for his wife—at least, not during the lifetime of her father. He had read his own heart and feelings by this time, and he knew that he loved her. He knew that he, the cool, calculating man of business, the shrewd speculator, who had never been overmuch inclined to believe in the romance of love; who had often declared that if he ever were to marry it would be for money and money only; he who had walked unscathed under the flashing fire of a thousand feminine eyes, had succumbed at last, like the most weak-minded of mortals, to the charms of a country-bred squire's daughter, who was neither very beautiful, very wise, very witty, nor, as he believed, very rich.

Yes, he certainly loved her. He owned that to himself now. He knew too that he couldn't help himself, and that, however foolish his passion might be, he could not bear to break himself away from it entirely, as he ought to have done, and put two hundred miles of distance between himself and her. He preferred to still linger on in love's pleasant paradise. Not with his own hands would he consent to shut the golden gates that would bar him for ever from that sunny precinct.

That Miss Culpepper was engaged to young Cope he knew quite well. But Tom Bristow was not a man to set much store by such an engagement. He felt, instinctively as it were, that Jane had drifted

into her present position almost unconsciously and without being sure of her own feelings in the matter. That Edward Cope was quite unworthy of being her husband he had no manner of doubt: who, indeed, was worthy of holding that position? Not much less doubt had he as to the real state of Jane's feelings toward the banker's son; and holding, as he did, that all is fair in love and war, he would have seen Mr. Edward Cope jilted, and he himself installed in his place, without the slightest feeling of compunction.

"He's an unmitigated cad," said Tom to himself; "altogether incapable of appreciating a girl like Jane." Which, reversing the point of view, was exactly Edward Cope's own opinion. In his belief it was he who was the unappreciated one.

But a far more serious impediment than any offered by Jane's engagement to young Cope lay before Tom like a rock ahead, from which there was no escape. He knew quite well that unless some special miracle should be worked in his behalf, it was altogether hopeless to expect that the Squire would ever consent to a marriage between himself and Jane; and that any special miracle would be so worked he had very little faith indeed. He knew how full of prejudices the Squire was; and, notwithstanding his bonhomie and rough frankness of manner, how securely wrapped round he was with the trammels of caste. He knew, too, that had the Squire not owed his life in years gone by to Mr. Cope's bravery, from which act had sprung their warm friendship of many years, not even to the son of a rich banker would Titus Culpepper, the proud commoner, who could trace back his family for ten hundred years, have ever consented to give his daughter. While as for himself, he, Tom Bristow, however rich he might one day perhaps become, would never be anything more in Mr. Culpepper's eyes than the son of a poor country doctor, and, consequently, to a man of old family, a mere nobody—a person who by no stretch of imagination could ever be looked upon in the light of a family connection.

And yet, being in possession of all this bitter knowledge, Tom Bristow made no really determined effort to break away, and to try the cure which is said to be often wrought by time and absence even in cases as desperate as his. Metaphorically speaking, he hugged the shackles that bound him, and gloried in the loss of his freedom: a very sad condition, indeed, for any reasonable being to fall into.

It was curious what a number of opportunities Tom and Jane seemed to find for seeing each other, and how often they found themselves together, quite fortuitously as it were, and without any apparent volition of their own in the matter. Sometimes Tom would be mooning about the High Street in the middle of the forenoon at the very time that the Pincote pony-carriage drew up against one or another of the shops, and then what more natural than that Jane and he should have three minutes' conversation together on the pavement? Sometimes

Jane would walk into Merton's library at the very moment that Tom was critically choosing a novel which, when borrowed, he would carefully omit to read. How quickly half an hour—nay an hour—would pass at such times, and that in conversation of the most commonplace kind!

Sometimes Jane, wandering absently with a book in her hands through the Pincote woods and meadows, would find herself, after a time, on the banks of the carefully preserved stream—river it could hardly be called—which wandered of its own sweet will through Squire Culpepper's demesne. There, strange to relate, she would find Mr. Bristow whipping the stream; very inartistically it must be admitted; but trying his best to make believe that he was a very skilful angler indeed.

What wings those sunny minutes put themselves on at such times! How quickly the yellow afternoons faded and waned, and Jane would look round at last, quite startled to find that twilight had come already. Then Tom would accompany her part of the way back towards the house, his fishing-basket empty indeed, but his heart overbrimming with the happiness of perfect love.

Once every now and again the Squire, meeting Tom casually in the street, would ask him to dinner at Pincote. Memorable occasions those, never to be forgotten by either Tom or Jane, when, with the drawing-room all to themselves, while the Squire snoozed for an hour in his easy-chair in the dining-room, they could sit and talk, or pretend to play chess, or make believe to be deeply interested in some portfolio of engravings, or to be altogether immersed in a selection from the last new opera, turning over the leaves and strumming a few bars experimentally here and there; while, in reality, rapt up in and caring for nothing and nobody but themselves.

Yet never once was a single word of love whispered between them, whatever mutual tales their eyes might tell. Jane still held herself as engaged to Edward Cope: but she had made up her mind that as soon as that young gentleman should return from America she would see him, and tell him that she had discovered her error—that she no longer cared for him as a woman ought to care for the man she is about to marry; and she would appeal to his generosity to relieve her from an engagement that had now become utterly distasteful to her. His letters from abroad were so infrequent, so brief, and so utterly unlover-like, that she did not anticipate much difficulty in obtaining her request. But, as she was well aware, there was a certain amount of mule-like obstinacy in the character of Edward Cope, and it was quite possible that when he found she no longer cared for him, he might cling to her all the more firmly. What if he should refuse to release her? The contemplation of such a possibility was not a pleasant one. What she should do in such a case she could not even imagine. But

it would be time enough to think of that when the necessity for thinking of it should have arisen.

But even if released from her engagement to Edward Cope, Jane knew that she would still be as far as ever from the haven of her secret hopes, and that without running entirely counter to her father's wishes and prejudices, the haven in question could never be reached by her. But although it might never be possible for her to marry the man whom she secretly loved, she was fully determined in her own mind never to marry anyone else, however strongly the world might consider her to be bound by the fetters of her odious engagement. Edward Cope, although he might refuse to release her from her promise, should never force her into becoming his wife.

The fact of having been appealed to by Tom Bristow to find a shelter for his friend when that friend was in dire trouble, seemed to draw him closer to Jane than anything else. From that hour her feelings towards him took a warmer tinge than they had ever assumed before. There was something almost heroic in her eyes in the friendship between Lionel and Tom, and that she should have been called upon to assist, in however humble a way, in the escape of the former was to her a proof of confidence such as she could never possibly forget. She never met Tom without inquiring for the last news as to the movements of Lionel and his wife; and Tom, on his side, took care to keep her duly posted up in everything that concerned them. A week or so after the departure of Lionel for Cumberland, Jane had been taken by Tom to Alder Cottage and introduced to Edith. How warmly the latter thanked her for what she had done need not be told here. In that hour of their meeting was laid the foundation of one of those friendships, rare between two women, which death alone has power to sever.

However deeply Mr. Tom Bristow might be in love, however infatuated he might be on one particular point, he in no wise neglected his ordinary business avocations, nor did he by any means spend the whole of his time in Duxley and its neighbourhood. He was frequently in London; nor was either Liverpool or Manchester unacquainted with his face, for Tom's speculative proclivities expended themselves in many and various channels. The project to bring Duxley, by means of a branch railway from one of the great trunk lines, into closer connection with some of the chief centres of industry in that part of the country, was one which had always engaged his warmest sympathies. But the project, after having been safely incubated, and launched in glowing terms before the public, had been quietly allowed to collapse, its promoters having taken alarm at certain formidable engineering difficulties which had not presented themselves during the preliminary survey of the route.

This put Tom Bristow on his mettle. He had been familiar from

boyhood with the country for twenty miles round Duxley, and he felt sure that a much more favourable route than the one just abandoned might readily be found if properly looked for. Taking a practical surveyor with him, and the ordnance map of the district, Tom went carefully over the ground in person, trudging mile after mile on foot in all sorts of weather, seeing his way after a time, little by little, to the elaboration of a project much bolder in idea and wider in scope than any which had ever entered the thoughts of the original projectors.

A month later Tom found himself closeted with one of the heads of a certain well-known financial firm, who were celebrated for their far-seeing views and their boldness in floating large schemes of public importance. With this firm was also mixed up another well-known firm of eminent engineers and contractors: but how and in what way they were mixed up, and where one firm began and the other ended, was more than any outside person could ever ascertain, and was popularly supposed to be a mythical point even with the parties chiefly concerned. But be that as it may, Tom Bristow's scheme met with a very favourable reception both from a financial and an engineering point of view. While still kept a profound secret from the public at large, its details were laid before some five or six well-known members of the House, whose opinions carried much weight in such matters and were a tolerably safe criterion as to whether any particular bill would be likely to pass unslaughtered through the terrible ordeal of Committee. So favourable were the opinions thus asked for, that Mr. Bristow went at once to a certain metropolitan land agent, and instructed him to buy up and hold over for him certain fields and plots of land, which happened to be for sale just then at different points exactly on or contiguous to the proposed line of railway. Such property would rise immensely in value from the moment the prospectus of the line was made public, and by the time the first sod was turned Tom calculated that he ought to be in a position to clear cent. per cent. by his bold speculation.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT THE VILLA PAMPHILI.

THE month of October had half run its course, the Continental Meccas were nearly deserted, the pilgrims were returning in shoals day by day, and the London club-houses were no longer the temples of desolation that they had been for the last two months.

In the smoke-room of his club, in the easiest of easy-chairs, sat Kester St. George, cigar in mouth, his hat tilted over his eyes, musing bitterly over the hopes, follies, and prospects of his broken life. And

his life was, in truth, a broken one. With what fair prospects had he started from port, and now, at thirty-three years of age, to what a bankrupt ending he had come! One way or another he had contrived until now to surmount his difficulties, or, at least, to tide them over for the time being; but, at last, the net seemed to be finally closing around him. Of ready money he had next to none. His credit was at an end. Tailor, bootmaker, and glover had alike shut their doors in his face. A three months' bill for two hundred and fifty pounds would fall due in about a week's time, and he had absolutely no assets with which to meet it; nor was there the remotest possibility of his being able to obtain a renewal of it. He had made sure of winning heavily on certain races, but the horses he had backed had invariably come to grief; and it was only by making a desperate effort that he had been able to meet his engagements and save his credit on the turf. When he should have pawned or sold his watch and the few rings and trinkets that still remained to him, and should have spent the poor pounds realized thereby, beggary, the most complete and absolute, would stare him in the face. But two courses were left open for him: flight and outlawry, or an appeal to the generosity of his uncle, General St. George. Bitter alternatives both. Besides which, it was by no means certain that his uncle would respond to any such appeal, and he shrank unaccountably, he could hardly have told himself why, from the task of asking relief of the stern old soldier. He questioned himself again and again whether suicide would not be far preferable to the pauper's life, which was all that he now saw before him—whether it would not be better, by one bold stroke, to cut at once and for ever through the tangled web of difficulties that bound him. Over his dead body the men to whom he owed money might wrangle as much as they chose: a comfortable nook in the family vault would doubtless be found for him, and beyond that he would need nothing more. Unspeakably bitter to-night were the musings of Kester St. George.

"A bullet through the brain, or a dose of prussic acid—which shall it be?" he asked himself. "It matters little which. They are both speedy, and both sure. Then the voice will whisper in my ear in vain: then I shall no longer feel the hand laid on my shoulder: then the black shadow that broods over my life will be swallowed up for ever in the blacker shadows of death!"

Suddenly a waiter glided up to him, salver in hand. On the salver lay a telegram. "If you please, sir," said the man, in his most deferential voice. Mr. St. George started, looked up, and took the telegram mechanically.

For full two minutes he held it between his thumb and finger without opening it. "Why need I trouble myself with what it contains?" he muttered. "One more stroke of ill-fortune can matter nothing,

and I'm past all hope of any good fortune. To a man who is being stoned to death one stone the more is not worth complaining about. Perhaps it's to tell me that Aurora has fallen lame or dead. Serve the jade right! I backed her for two thousand at Doncaster, and lost. Perhaps it's only one of Dimmock's 'straight tips,' imploring me to invest a 'little spare cash' on some mysterious favourite that is sure to be scratched before the race comes off. Never again, O Mentor, shall thy fingers touch gold of mine! All the spare cash I have will be needed to pay for my winding-sheet."

With a sneer, he flicked open the envelope that held the telegram, opened it, and read the one line that was written therein.

"*Lionel Dering is dead. Come here at once!*"

The telegram dropped from his fingers—the cigar fell from his lips. A strange, death-like pallor overspread his face. He pressed both his hands to his left side, and sank back in his chair like a man suddenly stricken by some invisible foe.

The waiter, who had been hovering near, was by his side in a moment. "Are you ill, sir?" he said. "What can I get you? Would you like a glass of water?"

Mr. St. George did not answer in words, but his eyes said Yes. With a deep gasp that was half a sob, he seemed to recover himself. His hands dropped from his breast, and the colour began to come slowly back into his face. He drank the water, thanked the man, and was left alone to realize the intelligence he had just received.

Lionel Dering dead! Impossible! Such news could only be the lying invention of some juggling fiend whose object it was to give him, for one brief moment, a glimpse of Paradise, and then cast him headlong into still deeper caverns of despair than any in which his soul had ever lost itself before.

Lionel Dering dead! What did not such news mean to him, if only—if only it were true! It was like a reprieve at the last moment to some poor wretch condemned to die. The news is whispered in his ear, the cords are unloosened, he stares round like a man suddenly roused from some hideous nightmare, and cannot, for a little time, believe that the blissful words he has just heard are really true. So it was with St. George. His brain was in a maze—his mind in a whirl. Again and again he repeated to himself, "It cannot be true!"

Then he did what, under ordinary circumstances, he would have done at first—he picked up the telegram in order to ascertain whence it came, and by whom it had been sent; two points which he had altogether overlooked up to now, his eyes having been first caught by the one significant line of message. The telegram trembled in his fingers like an aspen leaf, as he turned it to the light, and read these words—"From General St. George, Villa Pamphili, near Como, Italy, to Kester St. George, 34, Great Carrington St., London, England."

And then once more his eyes took in the brief, pregnant message, "Lionel Dering is dead. Come here at once."

It was all true, then—all blissfully true—and not a wild hallucination of his own disordered mind! Still he seemed as though he could not possibly realize it. He glanced round. No one was regarding him. He pressed the telegram to his lips twice, passionately. Then he folded it up carefully and accurately, and put it away in the breast-pocket of his frock-coat. Then, pulling his hat over his brow, and burying his hands deep in his pockets, he lounged slowly out of the club, greeting no one, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left; and so, going slowly through the streets with eyes fixed straight before him, he at length reached his rooms in Great Carrington Street.

Twenty minutes sufficed for the packing of his portmanteau. Kester St. George was his own valet now. He had been obliged to dispense with the services of Pierre Janvard months ago, having no longer the means of keeping him. When his portmanteau was locked and strapped, he scribbled on a piece of paper, "Shall not be back for a week," affixed the paper outside his door, took a last glance round, pulled-to the door, carried his luggage downstairs, hailed the first empty hansom that passed him, and was driven to the terminus at London Bridge. But before reaching the station, he stopped the cab at a tavern kept by a sporting publican to whom he was well known. From this man he obtained a loan of thirty pounds on his watch and chain and diamond pin. After drinking one small cup of black coffee and cognac, he paced the flags of the station till the train was ready, smoking one strong cigar after another, and seeing and heeding nothing of the busy scene around him.

And so, still like a man in a dream, he started on his journey. He changed mechanically from railway to steamer, and from steamer to railway; he dozed, he smoked, he drank coffee and cognac; he waited for a train here and a conveyance there, but otherwise he did not break the continuity of his journey; and, at last, he found himself by the shore of Como, inquiring his way to the Villa Pamphili.

He was still like a man in a dream. That sense of unreality with which he had started on his journey still clung to him. Not even when he saw the white walls of the villa glimmering in the moonlight, not even when he stood for a moment with his uncle's hand clasped in his; could he quite believe in the actuality of what he saw around him. But he was thoroughly worn out by this time, and by common consent all conversation was deferred till the morrow. Ten hours of unbroken sleep made Kester St. George feel like another man.

Rapidly as Kester had performed his journey, there were two individuals who had reached the scene before him. They were Mr. Drayton, the Duxley superintendent of police, and Mr. Whiffins, the detective officer from Scotland Yard. General St. George, acting

under the advice of Tom Bristow, had telegraphed to the police authorities the fact of Lionel's death at the same time that he had communicated with Kester. But there had been some delay in the transmission of the message to the latter; as a consequence of which the two officers had reached the villa some five or six hours before Kester's arrival. The object of their journey was purely for the purpose of identification. They were there to satisfy themselves and their superiors that Lionel Dering, and no one but he, was really dead. Of the presence of Tom Bristow in the villa neither they nor Kester had any knowledge whatever, nor was he once seen by any of the three while they were there.

As Kester was dressing in the morning, his eye was caught by the figure of a man who was lounging slowly through the winding garden paths, plucking a flower here and there as he went. He gave a great start of surprise and his face blanched for a moment when his eyes first rested on the man. At that instant Hewitt, General St. George's valet, came in with Kester's hot water for shaving. "Who is that?" said Mr. St. George sharply, as he pointed to the figure in the garden.

"That gentleman, sir, is Mr. Richard Dering, a younger brother of the late Mr. Lionel," answered Hewitt.

"And how long has he been here?"

"He arrived here from India eight days ago."

"In time to see his brother alive?"

"Oh, yes, sir. It is only five days since Mr. Lionel died."

"Was Mr. Richard with his brother when he died?"

"I believe so, sir. But not being there myself, I cannot say for certain. Mr. Richard has come from India for the benefit of his health. We had been expecting him nearly two months before he came."

"I suppose this fellow will step into his brother's shoes and inherit the few thousands my uncle will have to leave when he dies," muttered Kester to himself when Hewitt had left the room. "But what does that matter to me now—I who am the owner of Park Newton and eleven thousand a year?"

It was with a sense of dignity and importance such as he had never experienced before, that Kester St. George walked downstairs that morning to his uncle's breakfast-room. He felt himself to be a very different individual, both in his own estimation and in that of the world, from the despairing impecunious wretch who, but a few short hours before, was sitting in the smoke-room of his club, deliberating as to the easiest mode of bidding farewell to a world in whose economy there no longer seemed to be a place for him.

As he walked downstairs he could not help thinking that if his cousin's death had not happened till a month later he himself would, almost certainly, have been dead before that time—in which case both life and eleven thousand a-year would have been lost to him for the

sake of one month more of patient waiting. What a surprise it would have been if in "that other place" his shade had suddenly encountered the shade of Lionel Dering! He dismissed the thought with an impatient shrug, but he could not help shivering, and for a moment or two an ice-cold air seemed to blow round him, that lifted his hair with its invisible fingers and touched his heart as with a death-cold hand.

Kester St. George and his uncle breakfasted tête-à-tête that morning. The meal was rather a late one. Messrs. Drayton and Whiffins had been up for hours, and were out exploring the beauties of the neighbourhood. "And as for Richard," explained the General to Kester, "he's one of the strangest fellows in existence. He takes his meals anyhow and at any time, and one never knows where to look for him whether indoors or out. Still, I like the boy—yes, I can't help liking him. By-the-by, I think he told me the other day that he had met you once or twice many years ago?"

"I never remember meeting Richard Dering but once," answered Kester. "As you say, sir, that was many years ago."

"Well, if you remember what he was like then, you won't find him much altered now. But here he comes to speak for himself."

As the General spoke, Richard Dering lounged slowly into the room through the open French window. He halted for a moment just inside the room, and the eyes of the two cousins met across the table, each one curious to see what the other was like.

Kester could not repress a start of surprise when Richard's eyes met his. For the moment it seemed to him that in very truth they could be the eyes of none other than his dead cousin. They were the same in colour—dark grey—and the same in expression. But when he came to look more closely, he thought he saw in them something different; a something hard to define, but palpably there. Eyes, they were, cold, serious, stern, and vengeful almost; with nothing in them of that frank happy light which used to shine out of the eyes of Lionel Dering. And yet, with all this, Kester could not but feel that the similarity was startling. And then the voice, too! It might have been Lionel's very self who spoke. It thrilled through Kester as though it were a voice speaking from the tomb.

Beyond the eyes and the voice, the points of dissimilarity between Richard and his dead brother were marked enough. Lionel had been fair-complexioned, with light flaxen beard and moustache, and wavy hair. Richard's complexion, naturally very swarthy, had been still further browned by exposure to an Indian sun. He had short, straight, jet-black hair, parted carefully down the middle. He wore no beard or whiskers, but cultivated a thick drooping moustache of the darkest shade of brown. Running in a line from his left eyebrow down his cheek was the cicatrice or scar of an old wound, the result of an accident in boyhood.

Kester had a distinct recollection of this scar. It had struck him on the only previous occasion of his seeing Richard, as being a great disfigurement to an otherwise comely face. When you caught Richard's profile, you said at once how like he was to his brother: in fact, both brothers had the St. George features—clear, bold, distinctly marked. Which, perhaps, was one reason why the General took to them more than he ever did to Kester, whose features were of a different type.

The two men eyed each other for a moment or two in silence. They might have been two gladiators about to engage in a deadly struggle, each of whom was measuring the other's strength. "This man is my enemy," was the thought that flashed through Kester's brain; and for the moment his heart sank within him. The dark, stern, resolute-looking man before him would be a very different sort of person to cope with, from good-tempered, easy-going Lionel.

"Kester, this is my nephew, Richard, from India," said the General. "Dick, this is your cousin, Kester St. George. You have met before, so I need not say another word."

Kester rose from his chair, advanced a step or two, and held out his hand. "Yes, we have met before," he said, "but that was many years ago; so many that I should hardly have recognized you had I met you in the street. Allow me to welcome you back from India. I hope you won't think of wandering so far away from home again."

Kester spoke with that assumption of warm-hearted impulsiveness which he knew so well how to put on. Five men out of six would have been thoroughly deceived by it.

"I have not forgotten *you*," said Richard, in reply. "Yours is a face that I could never forget. I shall not go back to India for some time to come—not till I have accomplished the task which has brought me here. You may take my word for that!"

He spoke with a cold deliberation that made his words seem very impressive. Cold, too, and pulseless was the hand that he laid for a moment on Kester's outstretched palm. But when he said, "You may take my word for that," he gave his cousin's hand a sudden sharp grip and then dropped it. Kester shuddered and sat down.

"Won't you come and have some breakfast with us?" asked General St. George.

"I breakfasted two hours ago, and have no appetite," answered Richard. "Should you want me, you will find me under the big yew-tree in the garden. I have put a volume of Dante in my pocket, and I am going to see whether I have quite forgotten all my Italian."

"Fine fellow that; very fine," said the General admiringly, as Richard shut the door behind him. "So earnest about everything—so determined to go through with any matter that he sets his heart upon."

"What can the particular task be which he has set himself to accomplish before going back to India?" asked Kester of himself. "I

would give something to know. And yet, what can it matter to me? When once I get away from here I hope never to set eyes on him again. I shall travel for a couple of years; and by the time I get back home he will have returned to India. No: nothing can matter to me, now that Lionel Dering is dead and that Park Newton is at last my own!"

Lionel's name had hardly been mentioned between uncle and nephew on the previous night. There had been a mutual avoidance of all unpleasant topics during the hour that intervened between Kester's arrival and his retirement for the night. But the object of his visit to the Villa Pamphili was one, the discussion of which this morning could not much longer be postponed; and he thought it best to plunge at once into the subject himself, rather than leave it for his uncle to introduce.

"How long was my cousin with you at this place before he died?" asked Kester.

"It will be a month to-morrow since he came here," answered the General. "I never got from him how he found me out—indeed, he was not in a fit state to be troubled with questions of any kind. It did not take long to discover that his days in this world were very few in number. The first few days after he came he brightened up, and seemed to be stronger and better. But there soon came a morning when he did not get up as usual—and he never got up again. He sank slowly but surely, and five days ago he died. His end was as peaceful as that of any little child."

The General paused for a moment: Kester sat listening like a man turned to stone. Once he essayed to speak, but the sound died away in his throat. Petrified and dumb sat he.

"It is all for the best, perhaps, that he has left us," resumed the old man. "I try to console myself by thinking so. To live for ever the life of a hunted criminal; to go through the world with the brand of a murderer on his brow; to have every hope and feeling, and all that makes life sweet and dear to ordinary mortals, crushed out of him by the weight of a terrible accusation from which it seemed impossible that he could ever free himself, was more than he could bear. His heart broke, and he died."

Petrified and dumb still sat Kester St. George.

"The circumstances of the case were so peculiar," resumed the General, "that when I saw my poor boy was really gone, I hardly knew what steps would be the most proper to take. For me merely to have made an affidavit that on a certain day, and under my roof, Lionel Dering died, might not have seemed sufficient proof in point of law that such were really the facts. I had your interests to think of in the matter. Satisfactory proof of your cousin's death must be forthcoming before Park Newton could become your property, or one penny of its

revenue find its way into your pockets. The question, as it seemed to me, resolved itself into one of simple identification. I communicated with you, but at the same time I communicated with the police authorities in London. As you are already aware, Mr. Drayton and another officer reached here yesterday, a few hours before you. Pearce, the old butler from Park Newton, is also here, and will swear, if requisite, to the identity of the dead man with my poor nephew. In Pearce's charge, the body will, in the course of a few days, be conveyed to Park Newton for interment in the family vault. Lionel died five days ago, and it became requisite to have the remains enclosed in a shell; but, in order that there should be no dispute as to identification, a glass plate has been let into the lid of the shell, so that the features underneath can be plainly seen. For the present, the remains have found a temporary resting-place in the little Church of San Michele, in the village close by. Thither, in an hour's time, I am going with Mr. Drayton and his friend. If you would like to see your poor cousin's face for the last time, you can go with us."

The General had nothing more to say, and began to chip an egg. Kester came back to life at last. A ray of sunlight coming suddenly through an interstice of the venetians, smote him across the eyes. He turned impatiently in his chair. The pallor of his face deepened. He wiped his forehead and the corners of his mouth with his handkerchief. It was a little while before he spoke. "Yes, I will go with you," he said at last in a voice that was scarcely more than a whisper.

An hour later General St. George, accompanied by his nephew, and followed by Mr. Drayton and Sergeant Whiffins, set out for the Church of San Michele. As they walked through the grounds of the villa, they passed the yew-tree under which sat Richard Dering in a basket chair, deep in his Italian studies.

The General halted for a moment. "I suppose you don't care to go with us, Richard?" he said.

"No, thank you, uncle," answered Richard. "I have been there once this morning already, and I shall go again, alone, before the day is over."

The General passed on. Richard bowed to Mr. Drayton and Sergeant Whiffins, who eyed him curiously, and then went on with his reading.

The Church of San Michele proved to be a building of fine architectural proportions, dating from the end of the fifteenth century. Underneath it were row after row of spacious vaults: in one corner of which, on a slab of dark blue slate, partly covered with a velvet pall, and with two tall wax tapers burning at its head, they found the object of their search.

General St. George went forward and stationed himself at the head of the coffin. Mr. Drayton took up a position on one side of it, and Mr. Whiffins on the other. But Kester lingered in the background

among the black shadows of the crypt. It seemed as if his feet refused to drag him any nearer.

Drayton and Whiffins had seen death often, and in various forms. They were men not easily impressed; but there was something in the circumstances and surroundings of the present case that appealed to them with more than ordinary force. There, before them, lay the lifeless body of the man who had escaped so strangely from their clutches; on whose head a price had been set, who had broken his heart in a vain struggle against the stern destiny that crushed him down; and who had now escaped from them again, and this time for ever. Did the red right hand of a murderer lie in that coffin, or was it really as guiltless of the stain of blood as the dead man himself had asseverated; and as those who knew him best had been ready to swear? Could those white lips but have spoken now, could they have given utterance to but one word from beyond the confines of the grave, surely the truth would have been proclaimed. But not till the Great Day of all would their awful silence ever be broken.

Drayton and Whiffins, drawing nearer to the coffin, gazed down through the glass plate at the immovable features underneath. Kester, leaning against one of the cold stone pillars, shuddered, but drew no nearer. Beyond the faint circle of light which radiated from the tapers, all was obscurity and gloom the most profound. Far away among the black recesses of those far-reaching aisles, among those endless rows of time-stained pillars, he heard, or seemed to hear, faint chill whisperings as from lips long dead, and the all but inaudible rustle of ghostly garments sweeping slowly across the floor.

"This is really our man, I suppose?" whispered the Scotland Yard officer to Mr. Drayton.

"Yes, that's him, sure enough," answered Drayton, in the same tone.

"He was close-shaved when he got out of prison, but his moustache and beard have had time to grow again since then. Yes, that's him, sure enough. I could swear to him anywhere."

There was nothing more to do or see, and they moved slowly away.

"Will you not take one look?" said General St. George to Kester.

"Yes, one look," whispered Kester; and with that he dragged himself close up to the coffin, and stood gazing down for a moment at the marble face below.

His own cheeks had faded to the colour of those of the dead man. In the yellow candlelight his features looked cadaverous and shrunken but his two burning eyes glowed with a strange light, eager yet terrified. He wanted to see—he would not have gone away satisfied unless he had seen—the face which lay there in all its awful beauty; and yet his whole soul sank within him at the sight. Fascinated—spellbound he stood.

"Yes, that is Lionel Dering," he whispered to himself. "Park

Newton is mine at last, and eleven thousand a-year. Why did he ever cross my path?"

General St. George threw a corner of the pall over the coffin, and the two men turned to go, leaving the candles still burning. The sacristan with his keys was waiting for them at the top of the stone staircase which led to the church above. General St. George went up the stairs first, slowly and painfully: Kester followed a step or two behind. As his foot rested on the lowest stair of the vault he felt once again the Hand laid for a moment heavily on his shoulder—he heard once again the Voice whisper in his ear.

"Come."

He shivered involuntarily. Involuntarily he turned half round, as he always did at such times, although he knew quite well that there was nothing to be seen. No: the coffin lay there as they had left it a minute ago, untouched, unmoved. But it was not his voice—not the voice of him who lay sleeping so peacefully there—that haunted the ear of Kester St. George, and filled his life with a dread unspeakable. It was the voice of the man, who had been done to death so foully at Park Newton, that whispered to him thus often out of his untimely shroud.

Some hours later, as Richard Dering was crossing the entrance-hall of the villa, a low voice called his name from an upper floor. He looked up and saw Edith's earnest face shining down upon him.

"Are they gone—the two officers of police?" she asked.

"They left the villa two hours ago."

"Satisfied?"

"Perfectly satisfied."

"Thank Heaven for that!" she said, fervently. "And Kester, what of him?"

"He will take his leave immediately after dinner. He has declined Uncle Arthur's invitation to stay all night."

"You will have to see him again before he goes?"

"Yes—just for a minute or two. I shall not dine with him."

"Be careful."

"There is not the slightest cause for fear. But here he comes."

Edith's eyes met his for a moment, her lips broke into a smile; and she disappeared just as Kester St. George opened the glass door that led from the garden into the villa.

(*To be continued.*)

AT THE SCILLY ISLANDS.

By the Author of "A Night in a Monastery."

THE Scilly Islands must have been known as well, probably much better, in that far-off "once-upon-a-time," than they are to-day. Indeed, in the present day ninety-nine people out of a hundred that you meet with first ask you where they are, and secondly, what they are like. The ancients came over the sea to them, as they did to Cornwall, to enrich their coffers, and increase their pride. To-day, in place of tin and precious metal, the islands confer benefit upon mankind by sending abroad shoals of mackerel, acres of potatoes, and such like commodities: productions that in comparison with their old treasures are as commonplace as are our own days when compared with the glory of the Greeks and Romans.

By the Greeks the Scilly Islands were called Hesperides and Cassiterides: Sellinæ and Siluriæ Insulæ by the Romans. The present name, Scilly, is said to have been originally written Sully, Sulley, or Silya. They were occasionally used by the Romans as a place of banishment; but their first mention in history is in the reign of Athelstan, in the tenth century. In the reign of Edward the Confessor the islands belonged to Tavistock Abbey, a portion being held on condition of their paying the king a rent of three hundred puffins. In about sixteen years' time they will return to the Duchy of Cornwall.

There are some forty islands in the group. Of these six are principal, and five of them only inhabited. The sixth, Sampson, gradually reduced its number to seven or eight people, who were then ordered to quit, and the island to remain henceforth deserted. The five inhabited islands are St. Mary's, Tresco, St. Martin, St. Agnes, and Bryher. The largest island contains sixteen hundred acres; the smallest ten. St. Mary's is by far the largest and most important. If by chance she sank into the water, and was seen no more, the others would soon cease to be known or heard of.

Next to St. Mary's the principal island is Tresco, where is the Abbey of the Lord Proprietor, and few persons think of visiting the islands without inspecting the celebrated gardens, which are open to the public. The whole of the islands at present belong to one proprietor, and are a source of considerable revenue. They appear to have been leased to the Godolphins in the reign of Elizabeth, and were rented by their representative, the Duke of Leeds, from 1800 to 1831, at a rent of £40 per annum. They then passed into the hands of Mr. Smith, who was called King Smith by the islanders. The government appears to be absolutely under the control of the proprietor, who, therefore, is in reality little less than a monarch in his own territories: able almost to

make and to break laws. Petty offences are tried on the Island of St. Mary's; but graver crimes, such as murder, when they occur, are sent over to be dealt with in Cornwall. In 1649 the islands were fortified by Sir John Grenville; and in 1835 the pier and harbour of St. Mary's were constructed.

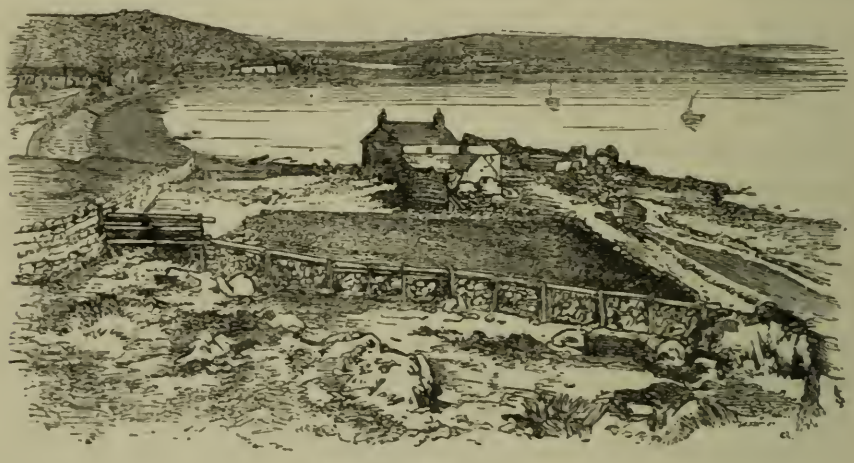
Sampson, some time ago, was abandoned. The next island, Bryher, contains over one hundred people; Tresco is next to St. Mary's in size, and contains about 300 inhabitants; but St. Mary's has a population of over 1500. This is the only island possessing any amount of animation and resource; the others might, to all appearance, have done well for Robinson Crusoe. The circumference of St. Mary's is about nine miles. The reader must not imagine from this word that the island is round; rather is it long and narrow; in the form of a horse-shoe or crescent, but not a circle. The town of St. Mary's is called Hugh Town.

The Scilly Islands, comparatively speaking, have been little visited, and are little known; but the time will very possibly come when all this will be changed, and the Scilly Islands will be as frequented as are many other well-known places. This might even be considered a certainty, but for the thirty miles of sea which separate them from the mainland. Few places in England present greater advantages of climate than do the Scilly Islands, and this renders them particularly favourable to consumptive patients. But whilst our fashionable watering-places tax too heavily the light and slender purse of many invalids, the small expense attending a winter in Scilly places it within the reach of most. This is, of course, an advantage that would disappear by degrees if the islands became much visited. At present the inhabitants are sufficiently unsophisticated to be tolerably honest in their demands: though a person contemplating a long sojourn at St. Mary's should be careful to form his plans and not give in to demands which appear to him unreasonable.

St. Mary's is the only island at present to which visitors can resort: the only island of the group affording sufficient accommodation to make a sojourn agreeable or possible. And even here no one must expect to enter upon a very lively or animated existence. The snipe, woodcock, and sandpiper abound for those who are fond of shooting; and this, and fishing, are about all that is to be found in the way of amusement. There are many fine rocks, and, of course, magnificent sea views; ferns to be found for the botanist, and perhaps a few rare discoveries for the geologist. One rare specimen of the sea-spleenwart I obtained with difficulty; and the plant which heretofore had lived and revelled in view of the grand ocean, was transported to the very different air of London. Tended, but remaining apparently dead during the winter, it has sprung forth into fresh green beauty, only looking a little more delicate and refined than when it courted the sea-

breezes of its rocky birthplace. In a quiet way, therefore, perhaps a sojourn at St. Mary's might be made interesting. But those who are in search of health must, for health's sake, be willing to make some sacrifice.

Perhaps no climate in England is so equal as that of the Scilly Islands, and it is this which renders them so peculiarly adapted to invalids. The climate is preserved from extremes of heat and cold; possessing in summer a mean temperature of 57 degrees, in winter of 45: an evenness regulated by an offshoot of the Gulf Stream, which washes the southern extremity of the coast. The air is soft and pure, and is said not to be relaxing; but this it is difficult to credit. One man told me that he had come to the Scilly Islands as a last resource for consumption; had grown considerably better and returned to England; had fallen away again, and come back to the Scilly Islands,



PROTHERESCO BAY.

where again he had improved. As he seemed able to live only here, he had taken up his abode at St. Mary's.

The Scilly Islands have been called "the Madeira of England," but they certainly possess not the luxuriant vegetation of that far-famed place. They are singularly deficient in trees; a fatal blot.

I touched ground with a curious feeling of being in a new world; amongst people of another globe: a feeling never before experienced even when treading for the first time the soil of a foreign country. As the inhabitants spoke English and looked English, it could only be attributed to the desolate and romantic situation of the islands: a spot so isolated, that when there you feel as if three thousand miles of ocean instead of thirty separated you from England.

Compared with the barrenness of the islands we had passed, St. Mary's, as we approached, looked of importance. Yet it betrayed a quaint, out-of-the-world aspect as we threaded the narrow, up-hill, unpaved thoroughfare which led to the inns.

We landed, without regret; and A.'s happiness at touching

terra firma was clouded only by the knowledge that it was impossible to get back again without undergoing a similar ordeal. There were two inns to choose from. Passing down the port, we made our way up the narrow, crooked street, which opened into a sort of triangle, probably called a square. A short ascent led us to the inn to which we had been recommended—Tregarthen's. After a few moments' parley and hesitation—for the inn, from its situation, promised to be somewhat close and stifling—we walked down the narrow garden path which led up to it, and secured rooms.

The house was old-fashioned, the rooms were small, low, and closely packed, as you often see them in old country inns; but they were clean, and as our stay was not likely to be a long one, we were satisfied. A great drawback was that we had no view from any of the windows. Our sitting-room looked on to the garden through which we had just passed. A. and B.'s bedroom had a prospect of chimney-pots; mine revelled in a narrow slip of back ground. The sea was quite shut out. In other respects we found ourselves comfortable; and the people of the inn civil and obliging.

Tregarthen's is the oldest inn in the island, and is by many considered the best, perhaps for this reason. But on the top of the hill—within a few minutes' walk of Tregarthen's—another inn has of late sprung up. The building, originally intended for barracks, is more substantial and modern than Tregarthen's; more airy and bracing; and the sea-view from its windows must be extremely fine. Between these two we hesitated. Had we contemplated a longer sojourn we should have chosen the higher inn; but for a day or two the coziness of Tregarthen's, together with the strong recommendation we had received, turned the scale.

It was cozy enough, but luxuriated in an atmosphere called "stuffy" by maiden ladies of a certain age. Whilst the ladies withdrew to their room the landlord came up to pay his respects. He had been master of the boat running between the Scilly Islands and Penzance for forty years: and pointed with some pride to a picture on the wall representing his ship in one of the most terrible gales ever recorded off the coast of Cornwall; during which, at the entrance to Penzance harbour, the boat swung completely round. "But we weathered the storm, sir," said the landlord, shaking his head. "No one thought we should do it, but we did. And the next morning, to commemorate the event, I went and bought that there instrument for my daughters," pointing to a piano religiously covered with green baize. He had had enough of the sea, and was enjoying a green and comfortable old age quietly on shore.

After a substantial meal, combining dinner and tea in one, we strolled away in the twilight on to the rampart, passing through the little star fort, over whose portal were the letters and date, E. R., 1593, showin

it to have been built in the reign of good Queen Bess, by Sir Francis Godolphin. But it had been a long, tiring day, and as we looked out seawards in the gathering gloom, we felt that we could do nothing better or wiser than retire with departing light, and leave night and darkness to the owls—if there were any at hand.

The next morning I agreed with a boatman to row us to as many islands as could be visited in one day. We started soon after nine o'clock. The boat was a good one, and three men shared the work of rowing, though two are generally sufficient. But it is pleasant to feel that those who are contributing to your enjoyment are not being over taxed, and we did not object. The water from the shore seemed smooth. The sky was cloudy; but the clouds were high, and not threatening. The breeze was brisk. On the whole we might have been more fortunate in the weather, and we might have been less favoured. We persuaded A. to accompany us. Upon a clear demonstration that the water would be, and must be, smooth as glass: showing, that we should be the whole time within shelter of the cluster of islands: that a rowing boat in the shelter of this cluster was a very different thing from a cockleshell of a steamer, out on the broad swell of the ocean. Finally and most forcibly arguing, that to come to the Scilly Islands and not see them, would be to return home a standing monument of ridicule for ever.

Our first destination, the Island of St. Agnes, looked but a very short distance from us. But as the skipper of the "Queen" had wisely observed, distances at sea are deceptive. It took the men, with wind against them, and tide somewhat, nearly two hours' hard pulling to get across. The water which had looked so smooth and alluring from shore, was soon rough and disagreeable; the wind increased; and the motion of the small rowing boat to-day, proved far more trying and uncomfortable than that of the steamer yesterday. A. said nothing, though frightened; but looked at us with the look of a hunted stag; with a bitterly reproachful look; a look that said we had beguiled her under shamefully false pretences. At length with a short, despairing kind of laugh, she exclaimed: "And you call this pleasure! How I am well punished for my folly in coming with you!"

B. again resorted to the nux, and again I followed her example with repeated success. Never had we felt in better condition. Our closeness to the water, and the fresh breezes were perfectly exhilarating. We might have been jolly as sandboys but for our anxiety and sympathy with A., who, soon pale as a ghost, and prostrated, was reclining in the boat. It was impossible to put back. When we reached St. Agnes, A. sat down on a bank by the road-side, and remained there whilst we went up and inspected the lighthouse.

The island seemed almost a desert place. It has a population of about two hundred, and is about three hundred and fifty acres in

extent. A wonderful place for fishing ; where in one night, it is said, the islanders will catch in the season, as many as forty thousand fish, chiefly mackerel. The slopes on the shore were covered with green turf, and there was a look of verdure about the whole island which made it one of the least barren in appearance. I do not remember to have seen a single tree on St. Agnes. From the lighthouse there was a splendid sea-view, and the few white cottages dotted about, in which the islanders stow themselves, were now visible. They pay, so said the boatman, about seven pounds a year for a cottage and several acres of ground, planted chiefly with potatoes and broccoli. Large quantities of these are annually sent up from the Scilly Islands to the London markets. The lighthouse is seventy-two feet high, and shows a revolving light with forty oil-burners. The copper reflectors were bright as silver, and everything was in that wonderful cleanliness and order so generally found in lighthouses. The light is seen by mariners in connection with the lights on the Seven Stones and Longships.

Beyond this there was little to interest us on St. Agnes. Some fine granite cairns there were ; but we had seen so much of this lately, that time could not be lost in gazing upon their beauties. Our next destination was to be Annette. This was a great island for sea-gulls, for the possession of one or two of which I had long had an insane and uncontrollable desire. On our return to the boat we found A. considerably better in health and spirits, and ready to embark.

Annette seemed quite close upon us, but was not reached for three-quarters of an hour. This is one of the uninhabited islands, and gave us far more pleasure than either of the others. It is forty acres in extent ; forty acres of wild barren rock, covered with furze and brushwood. Few people visit it ; and here, solitary and apart from mankind, the wild birds build their nests.

Jumping from the boat to the shore, we clambered up the rocks, and walked to the further end of the island. What solitude ! Nothing but the sea around : a small island on which never man had built nor lived. Thousands of sea-gulls rose whirling in the air, shrieking and distressed at our intrusion. On the rocks everywhere were innumerable nests, some containing eggs, some young birds : the eggs most of them larger than a hen's, greyish and specked with brown spots. Many of these gulls were of the lesser black-backed species. The young birds were all, unfortunately, too small to carry away.

The sense of freedom and isolation from the world this island gave us was delightful. I had never experienced anything like it before ; never having been upon anything so desolate and deserted. It was the feeling of reading Robinson Crusoe brought into reality. We could not avoid agreeing that to come here for a week in fine weather, with tents and provisions and a party of choice friends, would be a very

memorable week in one's life. The view from the end of the island was particularly beautiful; the grouping of the rocks in the water: rocks which are called the Dogs of Scilly, and which can be destructive as they are picturesque. Here Sir Cloudesley Shovel was wrecked in the *Association*, and lost; also the *Thames*, in 1841, with all hands, was lost; also the *Douro*, in 1843, with sixty-one lives. Beyond all was the Bishop Rock, crowned by its granite lighthouse, for which it took two years merely to lay the foundation stone. The lighthouse is one hundred and forty-eight feet high, and exposed to terrific seas. A storm wave in the winter of 1859 swept away the fog-bell at the top, weighing three hundredweight.

We lingered long on this island; enjoying the isolation; the seas around; looking for young gulls, admiring the eggs, and wondering at the nooks and crannies in which the old birds build their nests—though from the scantiness of the material they must make somewhat hard beds. for the young. All this time the gulls were whirling above, darkening the air, and rendering it noisy with their plaintive and incessant cries. But we could not stay for ever, and at last we set off for Tresco. This time the men hoisted the sails, and in a very short space of time, compared with the time it would have taken to row, we reached the island.

Tresco is, in one way, the most notable of the group, as being the residence of the proprietor of the islands. It is seven hundred acres in extent, and contains about four hundred people. But on first landing it seems almost as deserted as Annette. You look around, and see scarcely a trace of habitation. I confess altogether to a feeling of disappointment at the result of our visit to the Scilly Islands. Perhaps had I not heard them so lauded, this would not have been. Vegetation it had been said was luxuriant as that of the tropics. Let no one go with this feeling. Rather let him look for barrenness and isolation, and the visit may prove a pleasant one.

Here we were at Tresco, the island containing the Abbey, and the famous Abbey gardens. In landing, we saw only a poor cottage or two, which appeared to have been shut up for the last six months. Diving somewhat into the interior, we discovered an inn with all the shutters up; and after knocking and waiting at sundry doors, with the patience of Job, a rumbling and rattling were heard inside, like the noise of an awakened ghost; bars and bolts were hastily withdrawn, and a maiden, apparently roused by our summons from a twelve-months' sleep, put forth a head.

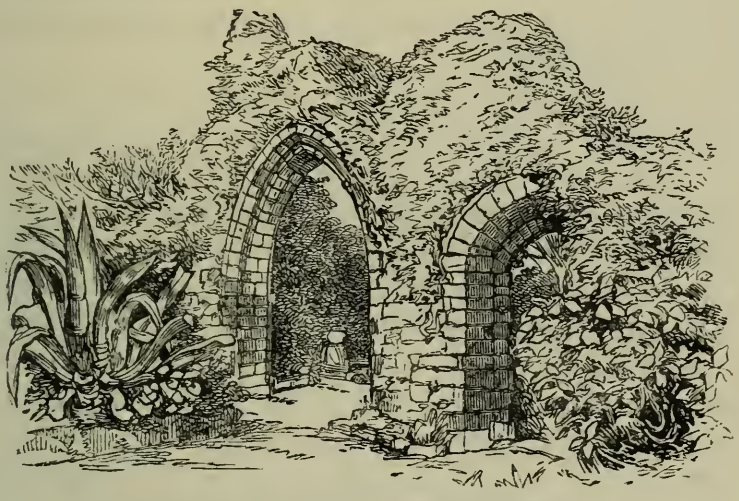
"Could we have some refreshment?"

"She didn't know, she was sure. It was like there was bread and butter and tea in the place."

Our exhibition of joy at finding corn in what we took for a Canaan startled the maid: who, possibly thinking she had lighted on a party of

lunatics, disappeared like a shot, and brought back a protector. He might have stood as a model for Samson. We felt as if we were going to be murdered, but he proved harmless enough; and what was still better, he managed to got us some tea and bread. Provisions the good people of the inn had put into the boat for us, but these we gave over to the rowers who had borne the burden of the day.

It was evident that visitors at Tresco were as yet of rare occurrence. Even the shop next door to the inn, which appeared to sell everything under the sun, from red-herrings to note-paper, and finished up with a post-office, was so securely locked that entrance was impossible. Whilst waiting for the tea, we sat on the banks outside, and certainly the island was a picturesque object. One of the chief sights is the "Piper's Hole," a cavern of granite, which may be penetrated, with the



ARCHWAY IN ABBEY GARDENS, TRESCO.

help of a boat and torches, to the depth of six hundred feet. But the state of the tide did not permit a visit at that hour; and so, the tea disposed of, we started for the Abbey gardens. The boat in the meantime was taken round the island, to save us the trouble of returning.

It was a pleasant and picturesque walk, with green slopes to our left hand, here and there wooded. Nearing the Abbey, a long stretch of heath opened out, literally covered with the wild convolvulus. We soon reached the gardens and were admitted, and after signing our names in a book (a form we could not be excused), the gardener accompanied us over the grounds.

Here we were disappointed. We had heard the gardens praised as matchless, and wonderful. We had expected much. It is no doubt a triumph of skill to raise anything approaching to beauty amidst surrounding barrenness: and there were tropical plants growing out in the open air which gave the gardens an unfamiliar and uncommon aspect. But the stiff, straight walks wanted grace, and there were few flowers to enliven the scene. Here was a tomb, with an old inscription; there

the remains of a picturesque archway, covered with ivy. Now we came upon a terrace, with a long row of aloes on each side : and other plants and trees abounded, such as the eucalyptus and camphor laurel. As a study, therefore, much might be found to interest ; but as a coup-d'œil, a general impression, we were grievously disappointed in the gardens. We quitted Tresco almost sorry not to have devoted the time to some of the barren islands.

The wind was strong and the sea growing rough as we put forth again. It was quite enough to frighten A., who, however, bravely said nothing. The men declared that unless they at once made for St. Mary's, it would be impossible to get in that night. As we did not care to spend the night either on a desert island or in the boat, we gave in. With the help of the sail, we scudded along rapidly, constantly shipping water, to A.'s inexpressible terror, who remained, nevertheless, bravely silent and calm.

The swell of the ocean was now sensibly seen and felt. It was beautiful to watch roll after roll sweeping along with majesty and grandeur ; now raising the little cockleshell so high up that we could see far around us ; now gently lowering her into a complete valley of waters. In the midst of grand and romantic sensations my hat flew off, and in a moment was far out of reach ; a roll swept us onwards at least thirty or forty feet : the hat was gone. Romance was banished. We were shipping plenty of spray and water, and rain began to fall heavily. I tied a pocket-handkerchief over my head, and immediately became an object of mirth amidst the surrounding gloom. I felt myself a sacrifice to the public good. The wind was roaring. St. Mary's, dimly seen through the mist, looked very far off. Perhaps we should not reach it at all. What if, after all, we had to spend the night on a desert island? Our plight was somewhat pitiable.

But nearer and nearer the good boat struggled ; and at last, with feelings of triumph, we entered the port, towards six in the evening. My first consideration before landing was to restore the handkerchief to its pocket ; my next to endeavour to buy another hat.

This was more easily thought of than done. It was the 24th of June ; a day kept in the Scilly Islands, and in many parts of Cornwall, as a general holiday. Every shop was closed, but one was at last prevailed upon to open its doors to us.

"It is our holiday," said the master, evidently half inclined to refuse admittance. "But," he added, more good-naturedly, "I don't see how you can go about without a hat. So please walk in, sir."

As I willingly obeyed, an elderly and respectable-looking dame issued from a side room, in a black silk gown, with a yard of train rustling behind her, and disappearing for a moment, returned with a stock of hats. At length I found one that was better than nothing, and we were afterwards puzzled to determine whether it gave me the look most of a

brigand or a burglar. I can only assert that all the old timid and unprotected ladies who afterwards caught sight of me, backed rapidly out of my presence, as they would have backed out of the presence of Royalty: with feelings of equal awe, but not of equal security.

On our way back to the inn it was agreed between us that the boatman should return in an hour's time to pilot us about the island. When the hour had expired, A. felt too knocked-up to accompany us, and we left her in solitude, reclining upon a sofa, to enjoy, over again in imagination the pleasures of the day.

As for us, we had one of the pleasantest walks imaginable. The boatman was an intelligent man, and proved a good companion as well

PENINIS HEAD.

as guide. We were soon free of Hugh Town; out amongst the bold rocks of Peninis; the finest rocks in Scilly; as fine and remarkable as many on the Cornish coast, though less visited and, therefore, less known and talked about. Some of the first rocks are called the Kettle and Pans; so named from their deep rock-basins, supposed to have been used in the old days for Druidical worship: a supposition probably mere conjecture.

Passing on to Peninis, we soon found ourselves beneath the Pulpit Rock and then above it: after that, at the very height and extremity of the rocks, whence we had a splendid view of the Southern Ocean.

"We have had many a wreck here, sir," remarked the boatman. "'Tis said, though, that Sir Cloudesley Shovel might have saved his ship, if he'd only taken the advice of his sailors."

"How was that?"

"Why, sir, it was in 1707. The weather was hazy and thick; not

clear as it is to-night. On board the admiral's boat was a man from the Scilly Islands. As they drew near the 'Dogs,' not knowing in the fog their whereabouts, this man said he was sure they were close on the rocks of his native place. The admiral in a passion, sent for the man and asked him why he thought so. 'Instinct,' said the man, 'and the strangeness o' the water.' The admiral said he would have no cowards on board interfering, and ordered the man to be strung up to the yard-arm. Which was done. But the man was right, for all that. In a few minutes the ship struck on the Gilstone Rock, and every man on board perished. And not only herself, but two other ships of war besides. In all about two thousand men lost their lives."

From this melancholy tale we turned to search for ferns, which, said our guide, grew amongst the rocks. We groped in all the nooks and crevices for a specimen of the male Asplenium Marinum, and at last found one: which was unearthed with much difficulty. The very one that, as I have before observed, is now living in a very different atmosphere, and putting forth fresh life and beauty. I had searched for one in the walk from Tol Pedn Penwith to the Land's End, but unsuccessfully.

We lingered long, clambering and gazing amongst these rocks; nothing, nothing but rock and sea around; as if this was all the world contained; and we the only people to enjoy it. At length we turned inn-wards. Through fields; past a deserted farm-house; through the churchyard, where the dead lie so solitary and silent: the dead of many nations; English, French, German, Dutch: many of them partly washed by the cruel sea. The church is very old, and partly decayed. Enlarged in 1662, it must have even then been grey with age. In the chancel lie the remains of some of those who perished with Sir Cloudesley Shovel; but the body of the latter was conveyed to Westminster Abbey, where an unsightly and even hideous monument was erected to his memory.

In Hugh Town the boys had congregated on the square, and were celebrating Midsummer Day by a lighted tar-barrel, which they rolled about with shouts of laughter, looking like imps in the fast falling darkness, as the flames of their torches threw their reflection upon the grinning faces and dark clothes. Half the town must have turned out to see them. They were having fine fun; every now and then rolling the barrel so alarmingly near to an unsuspicious group that it scattered them in all directions: sending forth fumes and volumes of smoke from their barrel and torches which seemed to affect and half suffocate everyone but themselves.

At length we reached the inn, and B. and I congratulated each other upon having accomplished a wonderful day's work, wound up by an exceedingly delightful walk.

The next morning was fine; and at breakfast, partly to relieve

A.'s anxiety about the sea; partly to make sure of the *Queen*, we determined to return home. The *Queen* was by far the best boat, and would not start again for some days. The weather also migh become rough and boisterous.

The boat started at ten. Without loss of time I called for the bill: which was less reasonable in its items than one might have anticipated in a place so little frequented, and before the season had commenced: settled it, and we went on board. They were loading the boat with mackerel, and here we found the skipper more willing to wait for fish than for passengers. Smack after smack came sailing round the corner; and as long as any were in sight, the boat budged not, though long past ten. As each fishing-smack came up, its contents were emptied into baskets and put on board. They sometimes take in as many as

STREET IN HUGH TOWN, ST. MARY'S.

five hundred baskets; but to-day, luckily for us, there were but one hundred.

At length the order was given for starting; and in a few moments we were slowly steaming away from St. Mary's. Soon we were clear of the Scilly Islands. Very, very gradually they receded from us; very, very gradually we approached the Cornish coast. The sea was much more rough than it had been in crossing over; the swell much greater and more unpleasant. But A. bore up bravely, and even almost seemed to enjoy it. As for the others, with the help of nux, they might have been sailing all their lives.

I had spoken to the steward on first landing at Scilly about some sea-gulls; and he had promised to try and get me some. As good as his word, I found about a dozen of them on board. Of these we chose four; three for myself, one which B. wished to give to a friend. These were put into a basket, over the mouth of which a sailor cleverly made a network of string. I can safely say that never were pets more

prized, and never did pets prove a greater trouble. Not only trouble but expense. I brought mine up to London; but they would not grow tame. On the other hand, they insisted upon being fed upon the most delicate fish, and as they grew older they thought nothing of swallowing a large fish whole. But it was a fine, almost noble sight, to see them running at full speed down the garden, with their great wings outspread. It brought the sea back to memory; and every time they gave their plaintive cry, the birds of Annette, the desolation of the island, the rocks, and the grand ocean, rose up in pleasant vision. At length, a longing to afford the birds more space and freedom came over me; they also absolutely needed a pond; and I gave them to the Zoological Gardens, where they now revel in such freedom as they are ever likely to possess.

But I have left our boat in mid-ocean, and the men, in charge of the fish, employing themselves in washing and packing the mackerel. As we neared Penzance an empty basket was slung up to the mast-head, and on inquiry we found that for every hundred baskets on board, an empty basket was slung up. This was a signal to the railway people; who then knew what accommodation would be wanted, and prepared the train accordingly: thus facilitating its departure with the least possible delay. As soon as we landed, the baskets were put into the vans, and in half an hour the train was on its way to London. We also were on our way to Falmouth, somewhat encumbered by our birds and ferns; and my vanity greatly concerned at my peculiar hat and uncivilized appearance now that I had returned to the civilized world.

We reached Falmouth about six in the evening; and notwithstanding a little disappointment in the luxuriant aspect of the islands, could not but admit that we had had an exceedingly agreeable excursion; one to look back upon with pleasure.

At eight o'clock one Friday morning, I quitted Falmouth in *The Countess of Dublin*, bound for London. On our way we touched at Plymouth; the entrance to which is one of the most beautiful sights in the world; at Portsmouth and Southampton; and passed through the line of fleet, of which we must have had as magnificent a sight as the Shah himself, who was then visiting London. The flags were flying from the ships; and over all the sun was throwing his glorious, his magical influence. The weather was delightful, the sea calm as a river. We reached London on Sunday afternoon at three o'clock, thus ending a passage at once pleasant and successful.

For my own part I sighed that my holiday was over; Z.'s irresistible companionship left far behind. And with a melancholy regret I whispered to myself the wise motto on the Sultan's ring: THIS ALSO MUST PASS AWAY.

C. W. W.

STEPHANIE.

THE villagers called it the Little Shop; and so they had called it from the first morning Keturah Bright opened its shutters. That was many years before the time of my story, for when the place was opened Keturah was a middle-aged woman, and when it was closed she had been dead some time; and she lived fully the number of years allotted to mankind. Before her death a great change had taken place in the small household behind the tiny dark room where the counter stood, and where the darning-needles and Berlin-wools were piled, one on top of the other, on the numerous shelves. Up to six years before she died, the old woman had lived entirely alone. But one morning a customer going in early to make a purchase, found her sitting in her usual place behind the counter, with a companion; and this companion was a child, which was rather surprising, since it was not known that she had any relatives, and she had never appeared fond of children. She was "close-mouthed," as they called it; seldom talking about her own affairs, and frequently disposing of questioners with some sharpness; but her visitor's curiosity was so great upon this occasion, that, despite the remembrance of previous rebuffs, it overpowered her prudence.

"Why, Missus!" she exclaimed, with good-natured bluntness, "who'd ha' thought it?"

"Ay," was Keturah's unflinching reply. "Who would?"

The customer set her basket on the counter, and stared at the child with an honest expression of interest, which settled at last into as honest an expression of admiration: for it was a pretty child, with a wondrously fair little face, and curling soft light hair.

"Heart alive!" she said next. "She's a pretty 'un! There's no favour o' you about her, Missus. There cannot be much kin betwixt you."

Then Keturah, rising from her seat, rested her two knotty, hard-worked old hands on the counter directly opposite the questioner, and faced her with a stolid defiance.

"Do you want anything?" she said.

"Ay, to be sure," good-temperedly ignoring the implied sarcasm. "I came in for some buttons for our Margery; but seein' the child there, drove it clean out o' my head."

The old woman brought out the required articles, in silence; in fact, she did not utter another word until the buttons had been wrapped in paper, and handed over to the purchaser. Then, as her visitor was turning away in despair of gaining any further information, she somewhat startled her by calling her back.

"Here!" she said. And the woman stopped, and looked round at her.

"I suppose," said Keturah, "that if people ask you about this child you'd like to be able to tell them something?"

"Sure enough, if I knew it."

"Very well," said Keturah. "If anyone asks you anything, you can tell them this much. She is the daughter of a son of mine who is no credit to me, and her mother is his wife, and no credit to him; and I am going to try to make an honest woman of her, and her name is Stephanie; but she is to be called Steenie, because Stephanie is her mother's name, and is no credit to anybody."

Of course there was no end to speculation as to the true state of affairs, when this was noised abroad, but no one ever knew the exact truth. Some said, indeed, that Keturah Bright, having been left a widow, with an only son, had been so passionately attached to him, that she had spent her youth in hard labour for his sake; and when he grew up he had been wild and reckless, had married a French girl of tarnished reputation, and, going from bad to worse, had, in the end, committed some crime for which he had been transported for life. But how the story had floated to Gowanham, and whether it had any foundation or not, remained a mystery to the last; for after the little girl's first appearance behind the counter of the Little Shop, both father and mother were lost to her.

In the course of time, Steenie, as she was always called, became as much of a Gowanham institution as the Little Shop itself. Being pretty and tractable, she was, so to speak, taken in hand by popular consent. The Rector himself took a fancy to her; and his daughter made a protégée of her, and gave her extra lessons two or three times a week. There was not much excitement in the life behind the Little Shop; but whether her existence was bright or dull, the child Steenie, living over day by day, bore it cheerfully and simply, and was only different from other children in being so conscientious, and self-possessed, and industrious, that she was quite like a little woman.

When she was fourteen, Keturah died, and then Gowanham found cause for astonishment again. She had laid strict injunctions upon Steenie to hold to the Little Shop, and carry on its business just as it had been carried on in her life-time. It would be a means of independence for her, she said; she would have a home of her own, and a place in the world; and as to being alone, there was no need of that—she could choose some elderly person to be companion and assistant in one. On hearing this, Gowanham was not only surprised, but rather scandalized. The idea of the child's bearing upon her young shoulders such a weight of responsibility was not a pleasant one, and many of her friends demurred against it openly. But in her pretty, steadfast way Steenie held to her determination to submit to her

dead relative's wishes: and even those who were fondest of her, became reconciled, and admired her more than ever. As to the choice of a companion, Steenie settled that herself; when about a fortnight after Keturah's death, her friend, the Rector, called to see her.

"I have been thinking, sir," she said, after rising from her chair to greet him—a modest little figure in black, with a gentle way of moving—"I have been thinking, sir, that I should like to have old Tibby."

"Old Tibby!" said the Rector. "What for, my dear? Oh, to be sure!" suddenly recollecting himself. "I had forgotten for the moment. You mean you would like to have her stay with you by way of company."

"Yes, sir," said Steenie, looking up at him with a simple anxiety. "I have been thinking so. You see, she doesn't find the almshouse so easy to bear with since the rheumatism came on, and it seems to me it would be best to ask some one to come here who really needs a home very much. Don't you think so?"

"I think that you are a good, thoughtful, little woman, my dear," said the Rector; "and it makes me very happy to be able to say so. I will go and see old Tibby about it myself." And so the matter of Steenie's companion was settled satisfactorily to all parties.

The years went on, and Steenie's little figure shot up into a tall one, and the girlish face became very pretty indeed.

"Dangerously pretty for a child exposed as she is!" said the good Rector to his wife, after one of his visits. "And yet, I cannot wish it was less pretty, for she is a sensible little thing."

She was a sensible little thing. Good-sense, and simple singleness of purpose were peculiar to her. There was not an atom of frivolity in her whole nature; and though she laughed and coloured often over the blunt, broad compliments of the honest countrymen and women who made their purchases from her, her pleasure in their admiration was an innocent, healthy pleasure, and brought her no foolish flutter of gratified vanity.

"Are you never afraid," said a young matron to her, "that people will be rude to you, knowing you are so much alone?"

"No," answered Steenie. "I am not afraid at all; and I believe it is because I am not afraid, that people do not think of being rude to me."

She was a cheerful little soul, too. She made the tiny dark rooms positively bright.

"It's a sight to see her, ma'am," old Tibby said to the Rector's wife. "It's a sight to see her sittin' in the big wooden rockin'-chair when the shop's closed, an' readin' out so grand and easy."

Steenie Bright became more and more of a favourite at the rectory. She spent many of her spare moments there, particularly after Miss Denham married and went away, leaving the old couple alone. In the eyes of good Mrs. Denham, Steenie Bright became nearer perfection

every day of her life. As she grew older, she fell into the habit of relying upon her for advice, and information, and assistance; for the girl possessed so much tact and clear good sense, that she was quite invaluable in all charitable enterprises.

"Steenie, my dear," the old lady would say, "I want you to visit those new-comers on the common. They are in great distress, I hear, and I should like to know if they are worth helping."

Or, perhaps it would be the Rector himself.

"Edward, I wish you would call at the Little Shop, and ask Steenie to see the Dowes, and let me know what they want. The children are ill, and Steenie has such a nice way with children."

It was on some such occasion as this that Steenie first heard of and encountered Kenneth Dart.

She had gone up to the rectory one dark winter's afternoon, and was standing before the fire warming her feet, her hands in her little black muff, while Mrs. Denham packed a basket of provisions, when suddenly an idea seemed to occur to the good old lady.

"Dear me, Steenie," she exclaimed, "I forgot to mention the curate to you."

"If Mr. Denham is going to take one, I am very glad," said Steenie. "I think he needs assistance."

"Just what I have often remarked," said Mrs. Denham. "He has been terribly over-worked of late, and he has just met with the person he wants in Mr. Kenneth Dart: who was obliged to give up his former curacy on account of ill-health, brought on by some difficulty of climate in the village where he was situated—marshes, I think, my dear. There, Steenie, the basket is ready."

It was very foggy and dark outside; and Steenie, with the basket on her arm, and her hands in the black muff, found the yellow dusk unpleasant enough after the bright parlour. But she stepped out into it bravely, and walked down the gravel-path briskly enough to set the young blood dancing in her veins.

But reaching the gates, she was stopped by a little accident. As she passed through them, some one, turning the corner sharply, and not seeing her in the murkiness, ran against her so suddenly that both muff and basket fell to the ground, and sundry small parcels were scattered at her feet.

"Oh, dear," she exclaimed. "What a pity!"

The gentleman—it was a gentleman—raised his hat with a hurried apology. Looking down, he saw a slight figure in a gray cloak and hat, and a lovely, troubled face uplifted; looking up, Steenie, almost unconsciously, took in the outward appearance of a tall, cadaverous young man, with a pair of fine, dark eyes, at this moment touched with a faint expression of annoyance, and her recognition of this expression made her recollect herself.

"It does not matter much," she said, in a pretty cheerful way, rescuing the packages. "It does not matter at all, it seems, because nothing is injured, and the bottle of wine is quite safe. Thank you," as he handed her a little parcel. "That is the tea. Nothing has rolled away, I think."

"Forgive me," he said. "I did not see you. I was wondering where I should find the rectory. Perhaps you can tell me, if you will be so good."

"Yes," Steenie answered. "We are before the gates, now. I have just left the house."

"Thank you:" and raising his hat again, he turned in through the gateway, as Steenie went on.

"I wonder," she said, quickening her pace, and holding something more firmly to the basket, "if that is Mr. Kenneth Dart? Yes, it must be. How dreadfully ill he looks, and how tall and thin he is!"

The Rev. Kenneth Dart was a younger member of an old but broken-down and impoverished family. He had nothing but his own exertions to depend upon, and so far had been the reverse of fortunate. Life had gone against him, and he had made a great mistake. There had been half a dozen sons in the family to provide for, and each must have some profession. The Church had not been Kenneth's choice, and his conscience stung him sharply when, after a struggle, he accepted it as his vocation. His soul was not in his work; but he was not brave enough to accept what his life had taught him to regard as a lower lot, or to labour and wait with patience. So he took up the task, which should have thrilled him to his heart's core with a sense of its divine purpose, and took it up coldly; though with an inward resolve to do it all honour, as far as a conscientious outward life would go.

It so chanced that Steenie did not meet him at the rectory for several weeks after their accidental encounter, but she heard him preach several times. And though he had forgotten her very existence, as soon as he left her at the iron gates, the moment that he caught sight of her among his congregation, Kenneth Dart knew her again, knew the girl's face in an instant. It was not only that it was a fair, fresh face—it was a good face, a face with a meaning. There was purpose in it, truth in it, brightness in it; it was the sort of face to encourage one to believe in the world, or, at least, to think leniently of it. Whatsoever the young hand found to do would be done with all its might. Not that Kenneth Dart saw all this; he was not, in those days, the man to follow such a train of thought. With him it was simply a matter of being attracted or repelled, and here he found himself attracted.

He did not make any inquiries concerning her. Information came to him without any effort to gain it. In his daily labours among the poorer people, he found a certain influence at work which now and

then surprised him. There was some one person in Gowanham who was not only dear to these poor people, but dear to them in the truest sense of the word. There was some one who had been before him, and who had crept into hearts that were as sealed books to himself; who helped these people, and gave them cheery counsel and bright words; and there was not one of them but had affection and praise for her: and she was only a girl after all.

He found this out one miserable, foggy November day when he was making some visits, and was in one of his bitterest and most dissatisfied moods. He was ill and wretched — he was often ill, and often wretched—and just on this particular evening his life seemed to him to be at its worst.

He had called at the cottage to find one child sick, the rest in an uproar, and the hard-worked mother in a state of irritated despair; and, after the first commonplaces, he was sitting wondering miserably what to say or do next, when the latch was lifted, and the sick boy gave a little cry of delight.

"I'm so glad!" he said, quite hysterically, poor child. "I thought you weren't going to come!" and Dart, glancing round, rose from his seat at once, at sight of the bright face, and the slight figure clad in gray, like some youthful pilgrim.

It seemed as if the whole state of affairs altered at once. The children ceased their bickerings, the boy's pale face quite glowed, and even the careworn mother appeared to recover something of spirit. Steenie set her small basket on the table, and began to take some packages out.

"Mrs. Denham sent them," she explained. "There is some tea here too, and a bottle of wine for Joey. And Joey, here is the picture-book, the one about the travellers. Children, who is going to put the kettle on for mother's tea? She is so tired."

Having emptied the basket, she knelt down by Joe's couch for a minute or so, turning over the leaves of the book and explaining the pictures, talking in a low tone. At last Kenneth heard the word "patient," and saw the boy colour faintly.

"I tried to be," he said. "And I think I was until I thought you were not coming, and then my head ached so, and the rest were so noisy, and—and——" but Kenneth lost the rest. She could not stay very long. She was obliged to return to the rectory, she said. She had promised to take tea with Mrs. Denham, and it was late already; so, with a few more words to Joey, she took the empty basket, and was going out, when the clergyman spoke to her, leaving his seat.

"I am going to the rectory myself," he said, a trifle awkwardly. "May I have the pleasure of carrying this?" And he held out his hand for the basket.

She let him take it, and they walked out into the fog together, she

wondering a little why he looked so unhappy. They said very little to each other. She was never talkative, and he was in a silent mood this evening. Simple-minded, steadfast Steenie Bright was sharpening his sting of conscience again, and making him more dissatisfied with himself than ever. It was so plain that her heart was in the work of her hands.

"You—you like this sort of thing!" he broke out at length.

Steenie looked up quickly, a troubled wonder in her limpid grey eyes. It was a singular speech for a man in his position to make; and it was made so abruptly, and in so strange a tone. She had wondered once or twice before why he was so very unlike a minister. To her he looked very unlike one, with his tall, rather elegant figure, his pale face, and that unsatisfied expression in his dark eyes. It was, perhaps, a natural result of her simple training, that she should have her own ideas of what was clerical.

"Like it?" she echoed; and then modifying her tone of surprise, because some quick, inner sense told her that it grated upon him. "Yes, I like it. It is making people happy. At least," with grave conscientiousness, "happier than they would be if nobody tried to help them."

"And you never find yourself at a loss, and are never tired of it?"

"I am often at a loss," she answered, "and often discouraged; but one cannot live one's life through without being discouraged, so I am not exactly tired. Life itself is never very easy, you know."

"True," he returned, in gloomy abstraction. "It is not."

He did not know yet who she was, and it had never occurred to him to find out. He strode on in almost entire silence until they reached their destination. There they found good Mrs. Denham awaiting them: and he was roused from his reverie by her warm greeting. The youthful figure, in its cloak of pilgrim grey, was as welcome here, it seemed, as in the cottages.

"You have found your way back again, my dear child," she said. "How cold you are! Come to the fire. Where did you pick her up, Mr. Dart?"

"I met Miss—Miss——" began Kenneth, and then suddenly awoke to remember that he did not know what to call her. Steenie, standing before the fire, drawing off her neat little gloves, turned to him with one of her bright, unspoiled smiles.

"Nobody has ever introduced us to each other," she said to Mrs. Denham. "We forgot all about it, I think."

"And he has been here all these weeks without knowing you? I thought everybody knew our Steenie Bright, Mr. Dart."

And this was how Kenneth Dart discovered the identity of the influence he had found at work. He found it at work often enough after this, and chance seemed continually throwing him into Steenie

Bright's path. He could hardly go out without meeting the pretty, quiet, grey figure. He could certainly never go out without hearing of it.

"She is very popular," he once remarked, rather stiffly, to Mrs. Denham. The fact was, the girl seemed an actual reproach to him.

Not long after this, the Little Shop had a visitor who had never entered its doors before. One evening, just before closing-time, Mr. Dart made his appearance, rather to Steenie's surprise. He had something to say about some poor people who were a great trouble to him; and he remained, talking. When at last he went away, Steenie found herself feeling both bewildered and pained, though she scarcely knew why. She never spent five minutes with the man without being vaguely conscious that he was moody and dissatisfied; and this night she felt more sure of his unhappiness than ever: and she sat so long in silence on her low stool, before the fire, that the old woman asked what troubled her.

"Trouble!" said Steenie, looking up a little. "I don't know, exactly: or, perhaps —— Well, yes, it is a sort of trouble. I am puzzled, Tibby."

She was puzzled very frequently before long, and it was always Kenneth Dart who puzzled her. He began to call at the Little Shop two or three times a week, though his visits were necessarily brief, and were by no means sentimental ones. Really, she was not quite sure that he liked her as other people did. More than once she had fancied that he was only coldly anxious about her, and was bent on analyzing her in his own way.

One evening, in coming home through the dusk, from a place where she had been unexpectedly detained, she met with an adventure of which her incomprehensible friend was the hero.

Hurrying down an unfrequented lane, feeling rather cold and very anxious to get home, she was checked by finding an obstacle in her path. Her heart began to beat, in a frightened fashion. It was a strange obstacle to be lying across the pavement!

"Some man has fallen," she said to herself. Bending over the prostrate figure to look into its face, she could not repress a startled cry.

"It is Mr. Dart!" she exclaimed, in a terrified voice. "Oh, poor fellow, how ill he looks!"

And so it was Kenneth Dart: who, having been wretchedly ill all day, had at last broken down, in spite of himself, and fainted, in trying to reach his lodgings.

Steenie knelt upon the ground, and lifted his head upon her lap. It was useless to call for help; and if she left him, he might die before she could bring anyone. At least, she feared so, noting his death-like pallor. She rubbed his hands; and when he began to revive, putting her lips close to his ear, spoke to him.

"Mr. Dart!" she said. "Mr. Dart, do you hear me?"

She was tremulous with cold, but she managed to speak in a clear voice, and its sound brought him back to the world. He groaned faintly, and when she redoubled her efforts to rouse him, he opened his eyes, and started at seeing in the dusk her shadowy figure and white face bending over him.

"Is—is this death?" he exclaimed, fearfully.

"You fainted," she answered, trembling, "and I found you lying here. I don't know how long it is since you fell. Oh, Mr. Dart, how glad I am to hear you speak!"

He tried to raise himself, but fell back upon her arm, and lay there for a minute, before he could utter a word.

"Don't try to get up, yet," she said. "I can hold you, if you only will not faint again."

"I cannot see you, plainly," he answered, at length; "but I think I know your voice. It is Miss Bright, is it not?"

"Yes," she replied, crying a little, though she could not have told why. "Steenie, you know."

This was all they said to each other, until he felt himself strong enough to rise: and even then, Steenie, helping him to his feet, and seeing how weak he was, almost feared he would fall again.

"You must lean on my shoulder," she said. "Don't be afraid of letting your weight rest on me. I am stronger than I look."

"But I cannot bear to try you this way," broke out Kenneth, feeling terribly impatient at his own feebleness, and forgetting how sharp his nervous voice would sound. "You had better leave me here, Miss Bright."

Steenie looked up at him with both surprise and pain in her face, but she recovered herself an instant later. She was used to the irritability of people who were weak and unstrung.

"I am sure I can take you home, if you will let me," she said. "And I cannot leave you here, in the cold."

So, submitting to her influence, as people always did, he was fain to try once more, and exerted himself to the utmost, even though he felt her trembling beneath his weight. He was not even able to make up to her for her perseverance when he reached his lodgings, for then the light and warmth so overpowered him that he fainted again, and it was all Steenie and his landlady could do to get him to the sofa. Steenie was still near him when he recovered, and in his intense prostration he found a curious sense of comfort in the mere sight of her face.

"You are very kind to me," he said, weakly, but that was all he had strength to utter.

She waited a little to see that he was really improving, and then she settled his cushions with a light, practised hand, before leaving him.

"You must try to go to sleep after Mrs. Rhys has given you a cup of tea," she said. "And now I will bid you good-night."

His languid eyes upraising themselves, because her face was so near, caught such a view of it as they had never had before; and meeting his gaze, Steenie blushed innocently. On his part, he was merely recognizing what a very sweet and youthful face it was, and how pure and fresh it looked, under the shadow of the grey straw hat.

It was quite natural that this episode should make them better friends than they had been before. They saw each other often, and when they met at the rectory, Kenneth fell into the habit of walking with her to her home. He liked to be with her; girl as she was, she satisfied him, somehow. And Steenie, herself, often found the walks pleasant as a memory. But Kenneth did not satisfy her. From the first he had puzzled and even pained her by his singularities: and as she began to know and like him better, she found herself often hurt in an undefined way. He made speeches that startled her; he was occasionally saturnine and gloomy. She grew thoughtful and silent. Old Tibby noticed it; and noticed, too, the habit she contracted of sitting on her stool before the fire, holding puss on her lap, and looking grave and absent.

It was nearly twelve months after the new curate's coming to Gowanham, that Steenie, passing out of the Little Shop one afternoon, encountered him striding rapidly down the street, hurried and breathless.

"Don't come near me!" he said. "You have not heard? No: I see you have not. The fever has broken out in its most violent form in several houses, almost simultaneously. I have just come from a place where two children are dying, and the rest are sickening with it. I am glad I have met you in time to give you warning. You must not go near Lower Gowanham on any account, Miss Bright."

Steenie turned pale. In her childhood she remembered just such an epidemic sweeping over the place; and, young as she had been, she had never forgotten the horror of the time.

"But if I am wanted?" she said. "The poor people in Lower Gowanham are all my friends, you know."

"It would be sheer madness to go," he said, and then stopped short and looked at her as if a new thought had struck him. "I believe you would go," he added, a trifle sharply, "if the greatest scoundrel in the place called for you."

"If I could do him any good I would go," she said. "Tell me what it will be best for me to do, now?"

"You must do nothing," was his reply; "except try to escape the contagion. That is the only thing your friends ought to allow you to do, apart from preparing assistance in the shape of clothes and nourishing food. Are you on your way to the rectory?"

"Yes."

"Then you may put together whatever you think will be useful, and when I have changed my clothes I will come to the house."

Steenie reached the rectory just in time to intercept Mrs. Denham; who, hearing of the commotion, was on the point of going out to make inquiries.

"You must not go, Mrs. Denham," she said. "It is the fever." And though she spoke with great calmness, there was a deep anxiety in her resolute young face.

Kenneth Dart came in the course of half an hour, and found two baskets prepared instead of one, good old Mrs. Denham in tears, and Steenie still dressed.

"You are surely not thinking of going among those people yourself," he said, excitedly, when she took one of the baskets from the table, evidently with the intention of accompanying him.

"You are going," she answered, "and it will be no worse for me than it is for you."

"You are a woman—I am a man. You have no right to expose yourself. There is no need ——"

She stopped him. "There must be need if there is danger—the greater the danger the greater the need. If you please, Mrs. Denham," turning to her friend, "will you tell him you think I am doing right?"

Rector's wife as she was, the old lady had her weaknesses, and surely the most natural of them was her love for pretty Steenie Bright.

"My dear," she said, tearfully, "you could not do wrong if you tried; but I cannot help thinking—I really cannot help thinking, my love——" And she quite broke down in the excess of her motherly fear.

But Steenie stood her ground. She looked straight at Kenneth Dart, with the first touch of girlish fire in her eyes he had ever felt the power of.

"You know I am right," she said. "And I would rather die because I had helped people who were suffering, than live because I had left them to bear everything alone."

He did not say another word. He went out of the room in silence. For a moment she felt a spark of indignation against him; but the instant it died out reaction followed, and she was sorry, just as a child might have been. She did not like to speak to him, and he did not speak to her; so they walked on without exchanging a word until they reached their destination. Then, just as he laid his hand upon the latch, Steenie's trouble became too much for her, and she looked up at him with her timid pain in her eyes.

"Mr. Dart," she faltered. "If you please, are you—— Have I made you angry with me?"

Had she been a child who had done him some wrong, she could not have spoken more simply. And she was so much better than he was—so far above him! His heart had never quickened at any speech or look of hers before, but it quickened then. And yet she did not speak warmly.

"I have no right to be angry," he said. "I am only fearful. Gowanham cannot do without you."

The gentle, troubled heart beat a little sadly. "If Gowanham cannot do without me, God will take care of me," she said, in a soft, half whisper.

Months passed before the dreadful epidemic died entirely away. During the weeks of suffering, Steenie Bright did her work so well and bravely that even her nearest friends wondered. The slender young figure passed from house to house, and from bedside to bedside, an almost angelic presence. It seemed that, in truth, Gowanham could not afford to lose her, for the scourge never fell, even lightly, upon her, though she grew paler and thinner, with her labour and watching. And her work brought forth double fruit, though she was quite unconscious of it. There was one man, who, in his self-enforced labour, looked on at her with a sting of conscience sometimes too hard to bear. Hers was the work of love; his a cold, bought sacrifice; and he had been weary of it before he had taken it into his hands. His earnestness was so great a mockery, hers so fair a truth.

She was very quiet in those days, he noticed, and there was often a shadow on her once bright face. She was tired out, and well she might be, he told himself. It never occurred to him that she might have other cause for sadness. But good, motherly Mrs. Denham became anxious, and accused her of being ill; and at last, one night, when she came in, took possession of her, and kept her prisoner.

"If you were anyone else but Steenie Bright, I should say you had a little secret, and were not quite happy," she said; "but I know Steenie Bright so well that I am sure she is only weak and worn out. There, my dear, you must not think of stirring. You are going to sit in the Rector's chair, and drink the tea I bring you, and do nothing but watch the fire until you fall asleep."

So Steenie was obliged to submit, after a weak protest, to which Mrs. Denham replied by kissing her, with tears in her eyes; and when later in the evening Kenneth Dart came in, he found her lying in the Rector's chair, wrapped in a big shawl, and fast asleep, breathing softly; the pale, sweet face drooping upon the cushions.

Mrs. Denham had been called out, so he went to the hearth, and stood there regarding the girl with a new feeling of unrest. He was ill himself, weary, and broken down; indeed, he had feared more than once during the day, that his turn had come at length.

Perhaps the unconscious intensity of his gaze had some magnetic influence, for, in the midst of his reverie, Steenie stirred, and the next instant her eyes opened full upon him as he watched her. She gave him a faint, sweet smile, but did not stir.

"Mr. Dart!" she said. "When did you come in? Do you want to see Mrs. Denham?"

"Not especially," he answered. "Now I ask myself the question, I believe it is you I want to see."

She moved then, sitting up, and looking at him anxiously. "You are ill!" she exclaimed. "You are afraid that——"

"Hush!" he said. "Don't be frightened. It is not that, though I am far from well. Miss Bright, I have come to you for advice. No. I have come to make a confession to you."

"To me!" she said. "To me!"

It was so evident that she did not understand him, that he felt his humiliation all the more keenly.

"Yes," he said, "to you. I have come to tell you what a paltry coward I am; what a hypocrite I have shown myself; how unworthy I am even of common respect."

And then he poured forth the whole story. Often as he had puzzled her, she had never dreamed of the truth being what he showed her it was, that his heart had never been in his work, and that he had not even tried to deceive himself into the belief that it was so. It was a strange thing he was doing—pouring out his remorse to this inexperienced girl: a little girl who had spent her life among worsteds and darning-needles, behind the counter of a Gowanham shop; and yet he had never been tempted to tell the whole truth to any one but Steenie Bright; and but for Steenie Bright he might never have told it at all.

"My life is a lie," he said, in the end. "A dishonest pretence. I will not keep it up any longer. I am not fit for my position: as you must see."

"No," she answered, simply and sorrowfully, "you are not."

"I will make what reparation I can," he said. "I will tell Mr. Denham what I have told you, and I will go away from Gowanham and from the ministry for ever."

She turned so pale that he could not help seeing it. "For ever?"

"You do not think," he said, startled by the sound of her voice—"you do not think it better that I should remain?"

"No," she answered, still in the same curiously-strained tone. "I think it better that you should go." And all at once she dropped her face upon her hands, and hid it in the cushions. But it was only for a minute. She looked up at him shortly, and spoke again. "I am very sorry," she said, softly. "I have no words to tell you how sorry I am for you, and how this has hurt me."

"If prayers are answered," he said, "yours will be. Pray for me."

It was scarcely three minutes after he said this, that Steenie noticed that a faint tremor passed over him, and he leaned his head upon his hand. She saw that he turned ashy pale, and before she could disentangle herself from her trappings, and spring to his assistance, he was lying upon the hearth, looking just as he had looked the evening she found him stretched across the pavement in the cold and fog. He

was miserably weak physically. There could be no mistake as to that. Mrs. Denham came hurrying in.

"It is the fever again, Mrs. Denham," said the poor child. "People who have fought against it so long are often struck down in this way; and," with a strange, despairing sob, "I never knew one of them to get better."

It was a great shock to Mrs. Denham. And that one night at the curate's bedside taught her a secret the existence of which she had never before suspected.

"Don't send me away," said Steenie; "please don't send me away, Mrs. Denham. I have worked for other people, and waited on them, and—— Oh, don't send me away from *him*."

Her passionate, yet half-unconscious emphasis on the last word told the whole story. And so she stayed in the rectory while Kenneth Dart lay there, going down alone to the very gates of death, and every watcher at his side thought each hour would be his last. But the gates were not to swing backward this time. Mrs. Denham said it was because he was faithfully watched and tended; because a desperate, clinging girlish hand held him back; and its owner having earned a gift from Heaven, prayed so submissively yet so yearningly for this one life, that it was given in answer. At any rate, Kenneth Dart was snatched, as it were, from the grave. It was Steenie who had saved him, Mrs. Denham declared, when he strove to thank her.

"I am not worthy to touch the hem of her garment," he said. "God help me."

No one knew but himself how dear the girl had grown to his unrestful heart during his sufferings. There were a hundred incidents which had drawn them together, and had brought hope to his soul. It was a strangely humbled and altered man who sat in the Rector's chair ten weeks after he had fallen prostrate at Steenie's feet in the midst of his confession. He was beginning to learn a new lesson, and it was Steenie Bright who had taught him its rudiments.

It was quite ten weeks before Mrs. Denham would hear of her favourite going back to her old place, behind the counter of the Little Shop; but at the end of that time Steenie was resolute, and made her small preparations to go.

"Tibby wants me, I know," she said, with a quiet smile. "And the shop needs attention. And as to puss, why, I have not seen poor puss for ages."

Accordingly, she went upstairs to the library, where Kenneth was sitting alone by the fire, to bid him good-bye. She stopped to talk to him for a little while, standing on the opposite side of the hearth, and replying to his remarks in her pretty, modest way. She was glad he was better; he would be quite strong now, and happier, she hoped. This last, in her soft, trustful voice, half timidly. And then he thanked

her, in a subdued, rather agitated tone, and there was silence. Steenie turned to go.

"Good-night," she said, shaking hands with him: as she left him, her eyes were so filled with tears she could scarcely see the flickering light.

But when she reached the door she heard his voice: "Steenie!" he cried. And he had never called her Steenie before.

It was all she could do to speak aloud, but she managed it with a struggle. "Yes," she answered. "Do you want anything?"

Weak and ill as he was, he rose to his feet, looking so fearfully thin and pale that the mere sight of him sent a new pang through her heart.

"Don't get up," she faltered. "Let me give you what you want."

"I want *you*," he said.

And then he caught sight of something which gave him a heart-pang too, and a passionate one.

"Are those tears in your eyes?" he cried.

"Yes," said Steenie, and stood before him with wet, dropped lashes, tremulous as before a judge.

Almost the next moment she felt his arms clasping her. "My poor little lamb," he said. "Why are they there? Is it because ——"

"It is because I could not bear to leave you, and think you did not care!" she whispered; and there the innocent, sorrowful voice broke, for she could say no more.

That night the Rector heard his curate's story from beginning to end; and while it was told, Steenie sat on a low stool at Kenneth Dart's feet, with her quiet hand in his. When the confession was ended, there was a silence, in which the Rector bent his head thoughtfully, and the gentle hand clung to Kenneth's with a closer, tenderer clasp.

"And you wish to take up your work again?" said the Rector.

Kenneth answered him with a silent gesture.

The old man looked at Steenie. "My dear," he said, "you have a tender faith in him at least; and you have promised to help him."

"Yes," answered Steenie, in her low, clear voice.

The Rector, after a moment's thoughtful looking at the red fire, turned to them both once more: "I can trust him," he said. "The man you love is to be trusted. We will begin again."

And so they did; and the Little Shop being closed, its young mistress entered into a new existence. And she was so faithful to her loving task of brightening and purifying the life she had taken into her tender hands, that in the end its record was as fair a one as her own.

LARRY'S GHOST.

ME cousin, Biddy Brady, had an illegant way wid her of tellin' sthories; she would have ye that ye wouldn't be worth a rush wid laughin' one minit, an' meltin' away inthirely wid tears, like a tallow candle, the next. Many's the hour I've sat by the light ov the turf fire listenin' till her. But she's gone now—may the saints rest her sowl! an' it'll be long afore I'll see the like ov her again. The sthory I'm goin' to tell ye, she tould me wid her own lips; an' I give it to ye as near as I can mind it.

"D'ye mind pretty Rose Terry?" sez she.

"Rightly," sez I.

"Well," sez she, "Rose married Larry O'Leary, though I own it was sore agin the wishes ov her family; for ye see though Larry was as clever a blade as iver swung a shillalah, he was a gay boy, and greatly given till take a dhrap over often. Ye see it wor a clear case ov love at first sight, for they met at the May fair; an' what betwixt Rose's black eyes, an' her nate dancin', Larry felt that he no longer belonged till himself; while she, that had had the best offers in the counthry round, an' had turned up her little nose at thim all, felt her heart givin' way before Larry's bold, handsome manner. Well, they wor married: an' ould Terry did the dacent thing in givin' thim an illegant weddin', to which all the boys an' girls for miles around, wor invited; an' they had lashins' ov aitin' and drinkin'; an' Paddy the piper played himself mad, an' wasn't able till see his way home, though it wor good break of day whin he left; he said it was the slape that ailed him; but my word for it, there wor a sthronger spirit nor slape at work on Paddy's eyes.

"An' the young couple set up for thimselves, in a nate way; an' there wasn't man nor woman, far nor near, that didn't wish thim good luck, for they wor great favourites in the counthry. As I said afore, it wor pure love from the minit they set eyes on other; so ye may guess they wor as happy in their honeymoon as iver wor man an' woman. Rose had her own way inthirely, as every pretty, smart girl will; an' she would have been the proudest wife in all the land, but for one thing; an' that wor Larry was still given till takin' a dhrap at times, which wor purty often; for ye see there couldn't be a wake nor a fair, but he must be at it; for he bate all for life an' spirits. There's many a woman would have been contint to have a gay, dashin', kind husband; but Rose wor sinsible, an' she knew that that one fault ov Larry's would grow till it would cover all his vartues intirely, an' thin her happiness would be gone. She didn't rason wid him, for she knew if he didn't give it up

for love ov her, her words would have no effect; an' she didn't scowld him, for she had the wisdom to know that in this way she would lose his love, an' so lose her influence over him.

"It wor three months afther their marriage, an' Larry had gone down one evenin' till ould Dinnis Ryan's wake, an' Rose sat her lone by the fire, thinkin'. As good luck would have it, Mike Terry, Rose's only brother, dhrapped in; an' seein' her lone, and lookin' sarious like, he fell till tazin' her on bein' onhappy; at the same time, knowin' rightly, rogue that he wor, that she wor the envy ov ivery woman about.

"'Now, Mike,' sez Rose, 'lave off yer jokin', for it's jokin' ye are; shure ye know I wouldn't change lot wid a Queen,' an' Rose give her head a pretty little toss that made Mike say—'Well, by me sowl, I think a Queen would be willin' till change lot wid *you!*' for ye see for rale, natural born beauty, Rose couldn't be bate.

"'Have done wid yer blarney, an' listen till what I'm goin' till say,' sez Rose. 'Mike,' sez she, 'I've got an idea in me head.'

"'Have ye, now?' sez Mike. 'Well, don't burden yersilf long wid it, me dear, for a woman's head is a poor place for anything ov the kind.'

"'Yes, I have an idea,' sez she, 'an' it came till me as I wor sittin' here me lone, just afore ye came in. Ye know, Mike, I'm the blissedest wife that iver wor born, except in the matter ov one thing; an' that is, Larry's habit ov bein' over fond ov a dhrap ov the craythure. An' this one thing is *iverything* to me, Mike; for shure don't I know there's been many a gay-sailin' vessel wrecked by one bit ov a rock; an' many's the woman, betther desarvin' nor me, has begun her married life in smiles, an' ended it in tears; an' all for that *one* thing. Now, Mike, listen; I've a plan in me mind, an' I'll carry it out, an' cure Larry, or die ov a broken heart in the ind. Ye see, Mike, ye wor always good at thricks an' sich like; an' what I want is, that ye'll get yersilf up like a ghost, an' meet Larry to-night afther he laves Ryan's. Ye're till mate him this side Craig Hill, where the road narrows off at the turn; an' I lave it till yer own smartness to give him a fright. For mind ye, Mike, it's a *fright* I want him to have; a fright that'll bring him till his rason, an' do him good for the rest ov his days. For I'm convinced this is the only thratement that'll cure him. Though he's as bould as a lion about iverything else, he's as feard as death ov a ghost.'

"Now, if iver Mike Terry loved anybody, it was his sister; an' he would have tuck his right hand off for her happiness; an', moreover, bein' greatly given till fun and deviltry, it wor a rich thrate for him to play off this trick on poor Larry. So he lost no time, but kissin' Rose, he hurried off home, to plan how he would do.

"It was ten o'clock whin he left, an' Rose put fresh turf on the fire, an' took her knittin' to while away the time, for Larry would not be back till midnight. The little kitten was fast asleep on the hearth,

and Rose could have slept, too, had she not had her great project to kape her awake.

"It might have been half-past twelve o'clock, whin there came a sound as ov some one runnin' in great haste, an' in a minit more the door was burst open, an' Larry rushed in, pale an' breathless.

"Rose started up, as if in dismay, an' thin closin' the door, an' puttin' her back agin it, she asked Larry if he would have the civility to tell her what he meant by this outlandish conduct.

"'Arrah, whisht! Rose, dear,' sez he, 'shure, I've seen a ghost, an' am kilt an' murthered inthirely!'

"'Ah!' sez Rose—'I see now how it is, an' it's what I've been expectin' this many a day. It wor a sorry day for me whin I left me father's house. I had me choice of the best boys in the counthry, an' this is what I've come to for takin' a man that loves a *dhrap* betther nor the woman he promised to love an' cherish.'

"With this, she sat hersilf down on the stool by the fire, an' throwin' her apron over her face, fell to sobbin' an' moanin'. The sight ov her tears brought Larry till his sinses sooner nor anything else could have done, for they wor the first she had shed since he married her.

"'Listen, alamick!' sez he, dhrappin' down on his knees afore her an' puttin' his two arms about her neck; 'it's truth I'm tellin' ye, an' no lie; an' may the divil take me if I took a dhrap more nor usual. But this wor the way ov it, Rose, dear: I parted wid the boys that wor at Dinnis Ryan's, at the road leadin' by Widdy Glenn's barn, an' came along undher the light ov the moon till I reached Craig Hill, whin all ov a suddint a cloud came over the moon, an' just as I got till the turn ov the hill, a great white figure started up an' sthretched its long skeleton arms afore me, as if till kape me from comin' forrad. But not a bit ov me thought ov stirrin' a step; for ye see I wor took wid a quare feelin' as if I had turned intill a big tree, that had its roots struck firm in the ground. If the divil himsilf had been behint me, I couldn't have stirred a step. Well, there stood the ghost, and there stood me; an' at last the ghost sez, in a quare-soundin' voice, as if it came from the ground—"Larry O'Leary, I'm come for ye!"

"'Well, if ye'll b'lave me, Rose, I fell to shakin' at this, till me very teeth clatthered in me head, an' I thought by this time it wor best for me to say somethin', an' not be whipped off widout so much as "by yer lave;" so whin I could get the management ov me tongue, I sez, sez I, "May I make so bowld as till ask who yer riverence is, an' what's wantin' ov me?"

"'Sez he, "I'm the ghost ov poor Ted Reilly, that came till his death wid dhrinkin', an' wor found dead in the ditch."

"'At this I shook the more; an' thin the ghost proceeded to tell methat havin' been under the ground in a warrum place, wid a lot ov fellows like him, that wor havin' a good time, wid lots ov hot dhrink

till their hearts' contint, that his mind couldn't rest at aise till he had come to fetch me till the enjiment. "For," sez he, "Larry, the company isn't complate at all at all widout ye; so they jist bid me come for ye; "for," sez they, "he's one of uz, an' it's small good he'll do where he is."

"'Whin I heard this, an' thought ov ye, Rose, I dhrapped on me knees, an' crossin' mesilf, I fell till praying like a thief. The ghost sees this, and he seems staggered like, an' he sez, sez he, "I'll tell ye what it is, Larry, I'll lave ye for the prisint, if ye'll promise till give up the dhrink inthirely. But mind ye, if ye touch a dhrap from this night forrad, I'll be back for ye, an' divil a chance ye'll have ov a *second* escape. An' now," sez he, comin' a little nearer till me, "stay on yer knees, ye spalpeen ye! an' swear by the ghost ov Ted Reilly ye'll niver touch a taste agin."

"'Ye may be sure I swore wid a right good will; an' thin the ghost sez to me—"Kape yer eyes shut, Larry, for I won't disthress ye wid seein' me depart for regions undher ground." I kep' me eyes shut, as he bid me, an' whin I opened thim, he had gone clane out ov sight; thin I took till me heels, an' niver stopped till I reached the door.

"'An' now, Rose, listen! Ye know that ye're the very light ov me life, an' forbye that one fault I had, there wasn't a betther husband to be found; an' will ye thrust me now, whin I say that I take the blissid Vargin an' all the saints in glory till witness, that so long as my name's Larry O'Leary, I'll niver taste another dhrap?'

"Ye may aisily belave Rose thrusted an' forgave him, an' two happier sowls wor not to be found this side Paradise.

"Whin the sthory came out, as sthories always does, there wor great wonther an' consarn about it, an' it made an imprission for good on more nor one lad in the neighbourhood. An' Rose an' Mike kep' the sacret well, an' till the day ov his death, Larry niver knew but what it was a rale ghost he saw."

THREE GLIMPSES AT ROYALTY.

IN THE ISLE OF WIGHT.

ON the 22nd of January, the eve of the marriage of the Duke of Edinburgh and the Russian Grand Duchess Marie, we were in the Isle of Wight. Friends and pleasure took us from Ryde to the loyal borough of Newport, then undergoing decoration in honour of the event. As we drove into the town, Billy and Bobby, two frisky ponies from Exmoor and Dartmoor, seemed inclined to run away at sight of an arch and grove of firs just planted in the street; but we passed through them in tolerable security, and reached, with some coaxing, St. Thomas's Church. Here we paused a moment to admire the exterior, and to remember that Queen Victoria had caused to be erected a monument within to the memory of the Princess Elizabeth, daughter of the unfortunate Charles the First. It represents the recumbent figure of a young girl asleep, her head on an open Bible. Her Majesty and the Prince Consort also put up two stained-glass windows near this beautiful piece of sculptured white marble. For the benefit of the uninformed it may be well to add that, when the church was restored, the coffin of the Princess Elizabeth was found beneath, which is accounted for by the fact that Carisbrooke Castle, where her father was so long imprisoned, is not far distant.

We passed some picturesque brick houses, and were suddenly greeted by the sight of a monster waggon, drawn by eight horses, heaped with festive fir-trees to the roofs of the houses. It was surrounded by carters, workmen, and by-standers, and the street was choked with trunks and branches. Billy and Bobby did not like it. They shied, backed, reared, and but for two gallant knights (not in armour but smock-frocks) we should have rued the eve of the wedding of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. We were, however, led ignominiously by the fallen timber, and finally drove in trembling through a triumphal arch on the outskirts of the town.

Having reached our destination, we naturally spoke of the Royal Family, and it is well to go to the Isle of Wight to learn how well-beloved they are. We were told that they visit the poor and sick, read to them, pray with them, take them presents, shake hands with them, "just like anybody else." That Her Majesty drives frequently from Osborne to Carisbrooke to visit Mr. Toward, the superannuated steward of her farm and gardens, and that her carriage may be seen standing long outside his pretty house. We were told an anecdote of Her Majesty's visit to an aged couple, who were engaged, the one in cooking, the other in shaving, and how that when the latter opened the door to royalty and withdrew his lathered face in affright, the Queen soon set

him at his ease, and is even said to have tasted the good wife's bacon and cabbage. Let the story go for what it is worth, which should be much to a home and charity-loving people.

The Isle of Wight is delightful even on a grey day in January, and we enjoyed our afternoon drive back to Ryde.

The mild winter had let many of the cottage gardens alone, and we were surprised to see roses in bloom on the walls of more than one thatch-covered abode. The laurustinus was in such abundant blossom, that its bushes looked like the "summer snow" of hawthorn, and purple veronicas rose hardily from many a bed. Our eyes were even rejoiced by a sight of primroses in pale perfection, and their darker sister the polyanthus, flourished here and there.

We were deep in a country road, flanked by towering hedgerows, and arched by interlacing trees. There was no sign of habitation save a few forsaken nests, and no sound of life save the twitterings of their late inmates.

"I think I see an outrider," said the coachman suddenly: "no one but the Queen has one, and he always rides a grey horse."

"If it were but the Queen! I have never seen her," said our companion.

Another moment, and two grey horses appeared in the distance. As they neared us the coachman again exclaimed, "It is the Queen."

We had no time to think of etiquette. Billy and Bobby pricked their ears, the coachman touched his hat, we bowed low, and so we met and passed Royalty. Her Majesty returned us a bow and smile so kindly gracious, that we are never likely to forget them. The Princess Beatrice was by her side, and another lady opposite. They were in an open carriage, dressed in mourning, and looked as unpretentious, perhaps more so, than ordinary country gentlefolk. They, like ourselves, had probably been talking of the Russian marriage, and wondering how the Duke of Edinburgh and the Grand Duchess would comport themselves on the morrow in imperial Petersburg—wondering, perhaps, how the Muscovite daisy would take root in English soil.

We can scarcely yet realize that we met our Queen face to face in that quiet spot; but the picture is stereotyped in our memory: the grey sky, the leafless trees, the green hedgerows, the lonely road, the plain carriage, and Her Majesty's dignified simplicity.

IN LONDON.

On the twelfth of March, the day of the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh's first public appearance in London, we were in the Metropolis. After a clear, frosty, star-crowned night, the morning broke drearily. Everyone was anxious, and astir early, in the prospect of seeing the royal bride and bridegroom. Expectation soon gave place to dismay, for before ten o'clock it began to snow. What of the flags, flowers,

hangings, statues, illuminations, prepared through the four miles of streets from station to palace? What of the millions of spectators? What of the procession?

Later on in the morning, thanks to a courteous citizen, we had standing-room in a corner house looking into Oxford Street.

As far as eye could reach, there was a mass of human beings packed closely as a swarm of bees just settled.

As the flakes of snow diminished in number and size, the scene grew eminently picturesque, and the white spots on their many-coloured ground rather embellished than disfigured it. As the decorations of the line of route were tolerably uniform, what we saw was a fair specimen of the whole festive four miles. Temporary balconies were erected on almost every house. These were covered with crimson cloth, and adorned with crests and monograms, mostly in the Russian colours of black and yellow—the initials M A prevailing. The balconies were filled with ladies, many wearing complimentary yellow bows, some with handkerchiefs over the "best bonnets," all in brave good-humour, despite the snow; remembering, doubtless, that thousands of their sex, less favoured, were ankle deep in slush close by. Hot-house flowers, statues, banners, furs, mottoes of "Welcome" and good wishes, and crystal preparations for the illumination, adorned the façades. Every available ledge, window, and balcony, covered or uncovered, was full of eager gazers, even to the house-roofs.

Now a movement in the crowd without, gives notice of the approach of something new, and our patience is sustained by the appearance of two officers on horseback and some soldiers. We are told that the one with the waving white plume is Prince Arthur. They disappear quickly. The question arises for the hundredth time of—"Will the Queen come? Will the carriages be closed?" There is a general laugh outside: a man has picked up a chignon encased in a net, and is holding it aloft for inspection.

"Here they are! Here they are!" arises in the midst of it, and the band strikes up at last, "God save the Queen."

On come the soldiers! A troop of dragoons, with helmets burnished and uniforms and saddle-cloths sprinkled with snow, file down the street. More soldiers, and more, for a quarter of a mile at least, and then the nodding plumes of England's picked men the Life Guards! What a glorious show they make! Down go the umbrellas, up go the hats, out wave the handkerchiefs. An open carriage appears—filled with gentlemen who look Russian: another and another, all open. The crowds rejoice and shout. Five carriages succeed one another slowly, in the occupants of which the people are scarcely interested; but when the first horse of the sixth appears, a cry of "Here she is! The Queen! the Queen!" testifies to the loyalty of London.

Six horses with crimson-tasselled housings draw the royal carriage,

open like the rest. A white bonnet, beneath which smiles a bright, frank, charming face that might be English, proclaims the Grand Duchess. Her mantle of royal purple velvet is lightly tipped with snow, and as she bows from right to left, we wish her happiness with all our hearts. The Queen sits by the side of this her seventh daughter, and facing her people and the snow fearlessly, assured of the warm hearts of the one, and of the soft, if cold touch of the other: she smiles and nods to the assembled multitudes of her friends and subjects. The Duke of Edinburgh, in his admiral's uniform, faces his mother, and with his bare hand continually to his head, returns the cheerful greetings of the people gathered to congratulate him. He has the Princess Beatrice on his right, and looks happy and handsome as a bridegroom should.

Our second glimpse of royalty is almost as transient as the first. The carriage passes slowly on, and the royal party continue their long course of triumphant welcome. More Life Guards follow, other regiments of cavalry succeed, the infantry appear in the rear, and the crowd closes the procession. The snow gradually ceases, and something like sunshine breaks through the mists to unite the Russian and English climates. The picture again stereotyped on the memory is that of a Queen still wearing the symbols of mourning for a departed consort, and of a fresh young bride rejoicing, we will hope, in a hearty welcome to her husband's native land.

AT THE GUILDHALL.

"THE merrie month of May" has come, and brought Alexander the Second, Emperor of all the Russias, and father of our young bride, to England. We are fortunate enough to be at the Guildhall on the occasion of the banquet prepared for him by the Mayor and Corporation on this eighteenth of May, and to be seated on one of the terraces of seats; and we survey a scene varied and original as any of the often-depicted pageants of royalty. In the centre of a room one hundred and fifty-three feet in length is a crimson-carpeted space, on one side of which stands a temporary throne, on the other an assemblage of the Common Councilmen in their purple robes, and at either end, in ranks that graduate from the floor to the base of the painted windows, are the two thousand and more invited guests.

At the west end, the two fabulous wooden giants, Gog and Magog, said by Stowe to be an ancient Briton and Saxon, look as if they were about to walk down upon the heads of the Anglo-Saxons of to-day, while at the sides, statues in honour of Chatham, Pitt, Nelson, and Alderman Beckford, regard the scene with colossal indifference.

Not so the playful sunbeams. They glance through the grand, pointed windows, flitting by the stained glass, and flickering about the

ladies like so many fickle cupids: kindling the faces of some into light, and leaving others in shadow. The effect is singularly picturesque, and the colouring opalesque.

We see this from our height, while below, in the centre, magnificent footmen announce nobles, ambassadors, diplomats, and members of Parliament, together with their ladies, if happy enough to possess them. Uniforms dazzle and orders blaze; foreign and English notorieties appear and disappear; and aldermen move to and fro in scarlet robes. We watch the kaleidoscope for an hour or so, until we begin to expect the imperial and royal party.

Meanwhile, the band of the Grenadier Guards perform within, and Bow Bells ring without. Russian officers come upon the stage in gold-barred uniforms, and expectation rises.

It culminates at last in a flourish of trumpets. Trumpeters, like coachmen, precede royalty; and we know, therefore, what is to follow. The Lord Mayor appears in crimson velvet robe and ermine tippet, the grandest costume of the day, preceded by the mace-bearer. He walks towards the entrance, and meets his regal guests. The band strike up the Russian National Anthem, the trumpeters pass through the hall, the Lord Mayor and civic authorities march in, and Alexander the Second appears, with the Princess of Wales on his arm. Shouts fill the hall as the Lord Mayor conducts him to his place in the centre of the throne. The Prince of Wales follows, with the Emperor's daughter, our Duchess of Edinburgh—followed again by the Duke of Edinburgh, the Grand Duke Alexis, and others. For the moment we see only the Emperor. He stands in the centre of the crimson dais, beneath the gilded canopy—tall, handsome, commanding—the greatest potentate of the North. He looks both the king and the soldier—born either to govern or to fight. He is in uniform, and as he glances round, seems immovable as a military statue. Figure and head erect, he performs his part in the pageant grandly, and stands unmoved, to be gazed on by all those eyes! Surely, the pains and penalties of power are legion. His daughter, the whilom bride, on his right, shows by her frank, pleasant face that she is already happy in her southern home, and feels, we are sure, proud of such a father; while the Princess of Wales on his left, looks, as she always does, sweet and lovable. The Russian and the Danish ladies are supported by the English Princes, their liege lords.

But our sympathies on this occasion go forth to the Emperor and his daughter, and also, as is natural, to the Duke of Edinburgh. The love of father and child is patent to all, and we English can appreciate the tenderness that has brought a Czar of Russia to our country, to see the daughter he so lately gave, in pledge of friendship and peace, to our care and affection. Let him be assured she will have them. As soon as we have shouted, clapped, and gazed sufficiently, and when

quiet is restored, we are told that the Recorder is about to read the address. He does so, and we watch His Imperial Majesty receive it undemonstratively and place it on a table behind him. Alexander the Second is not one to betray his feelings, we imagine—though we mistake if they do not lie strong and deep beneath that quiet, grave demeanour.

We listen breathlessly as he reads his reply. We hear the greater portion of it. He has a strong foreign accent, and appears to pronounce English with difficulty. But the faltering of the voice on the words "My beloved daughter" is more eloquent than all the rest, and doubtless affects his enunciation. Those three tender words reach every heart in the vast assembly. The Czar has time given him to control his emotion, for a prolonged and universal cheer succeeds them; and when he is permitted to resume, the words "the affectionate home she finds in your country," call forth another, and another. We allecho his concluding wish, that friendly relations may be established between Russia and Great Britain.

"Blessings brighten as they take their flight," and the richest are fleetest. Our two hours of waiting and short period of fruition are succeeded by a further demand on our patience.

The Lady Mayoress is presented, attired in imperial yellow, and led forth by the Czar. Oh! to be a Lady Mayoress for the nonce!—or to be a Lord Mayor, with the Princess of Wales touching his arm! Royalty disappears slowly, followed by such Cabinet Ministers and foreign ambassadors as are invited to share their repast in the Council Chamber, and we are left to the pleasures of imagination and reflection. The weight of these sits somewhat heavily for the best part of two hours, on the two thousand and odd who are earnestly entreated to retain their seats in the Guildhall and Pavilion until after the departure of the Royal guests. We imagine what they eat, how they eat, and what they say while they eat: then we reflect. This is more useful; for we strive to recall the changes in manners and civilization since Guildhall was built and Peter the Great, former Czar of Russia, served his strange apprenticeship in Holland and England. Pennant, in his "History of London," tells us of feasts, and feasts, given in the Hall, which grew so rapidly in expense and splendour that a sumptuary law was made in the time of Philip and Mary to lessen them. He cites one made by Sir William Acton in honour of Charles the First on his return from Scotland, unparalleled in magnificence; when five hundred dishes graced the board:—and one given to George the Third, which cost the city over six thousand pounds. It would be curious to compare the bills of fare of these city entertainments, and to show how they have gradually changed from unintelligible English to unintelligible French. In Henry the Seventh's time, they had Pekoks, Fesawntes, Heronusews, Sotelties, and the like: in George the Third's, Tondron Devaux a la Dauzie, Popiets

of Veale Glasse, Mushrooms au Blank, &c. &c.: and in Queen Victoria's, Galantines de volaille, Balotines d'Agneau, Poulets a la Béchamel, Pâtisserie a la Parisienne, Crêmes a la Palestine, and Gelées a la Macédoine!

But to return to Russia and her Czars, while her last Emperor is feasting. We rejoice that we treated Peter the Great hospitably, and are resolved to ignore more recent international hostility. We remember that it was declared by the prophetic, during the reign of Alexander the First, that he was "The King of the North" mentioned at the close of the book of Daniel, who was to "come against" the King of the South "like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over"—and that numerous timid minds were in terrified expectation of this onslaught in Great Britain. Whereas, a second Alexander, "King of the North," comes in all amity to visit Queen and people. Before all, we reflect that this is the Alexander who deserves the title of Great, because he has emancipated his subjects from the curse and bondage of serfdom, and in spite of overpowering opposition has made of them free citizens and free peasants. We will pray that this his stay in the country of Wilberforce and Livingstone, may inaugurate a union of Russia with England for the suppression of the slave-trade throughout the world—and that the presence of the victors of Ashantee in this hall to-day, may be a happy omen.

But even reflection cannot last for ever. Conversation and observation, however, keep us awake until we are again rejoiced by the fanfare of trumpets and the brief reappearance of our notable modern Alexander. Tall, handsome, young-looking—he heads the procession with the Lady Mayoress, and passes slowly through the hall, bowing from side to side as we cheer him and wave our handkerchiefs. We see the genial Prince of Wales shake hands cordially with some one as he follows the Duke of Edinburgh, and the ladies bow and smile—the rest pass on. We only wish the Queen had been here to make the pageant perfect.

Through crimson passages, and hot-house flowers, and portraits of judges, to the museum, where we also—the long-expectants—have a royal banquet ready. "The Mayor and Corporation know how to entertain," we hear a learned professor say on our left. How admirably it is arranged! An elegant "menu" of wonderful French dishes, emblazoned with Russian and English arms and encircled by a wreath, acquaints each gourmand with his bill of fare, and waiters serve with incomparable ease. They wait, but we do not. Surely the rivers must have been drained to provide a sufficiency of Mayonnaise of salmon for all these thousands. And there is much more than enough. No wonder aldermen are proverbially stout and florid, if they live as they entertain.

Through more crimson passages and flowers to the library, where a gay throng is assembled. We are now able to note the beauty of the ladies and their dresses, as they promenade to the inspiring sounds of glees, madrigals, and part-songs, given by the Orpheus Glee Union.

"Make way for the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress," suddenly cries the mace-bearer, and Alderman Lusk, Right Honourable, and Member of Parliament, walks through the crowd, with his lady. They stop to shake hands with our companion; the Lord Mayor, in allusion to his own pompous robes, whispers drily, "Solomon in all his glory," and passes on.

One group of officers in uniform and well-dressed handsome women, particularly attracts us. They are talking merrily, flirting possibly—as soldiers and women will—but they are gay and bright as May itself. Are they feather-bed soldiers? Scarcely; for they are bronzed and medalled. We pause, look, enquire, and are rewarded by hearing that we are close to the heroes of Coomassie and Ashantee. There is Sir Garnet Wolseley in general's uniform, with stars and crosses. He is short and young-looking—by nature fair, by Africa brown. He is laughing with all his heart. Close by is the broad-shouldered, stalwart soldier who first attracted us by his build and face: this is Festing, or Festung? (fortress) as is suggested. Sartorius, also, is at hand, who led the handful of Marines as a forlorn hope—young, brown, and handsome. A little man in plain morning dress is in their midst, who is, we hear, the renowned Sir John Glover. No wonder the pretty faces they look at smile and blush at such distinguished proximity, for we, who are not within the charmed circle, warm towards them, and wish them as good luck in love as in war.

Thus our third glimpse at Royalty is happily supplemented by a glance at Royalty's safeguard, Bravery.

ANNE BEALE.

THE DIAMOND BRACELET.

By the Author of "EAST LYNNE."

I.

A LITTLE man was striding about his library with impatient steps. He wore a wadded dressing-gown, handsome once, but remarkably shabby now, and he wrapped it closely round him, though the heat of the weather was intense. But Colonel Hope, large as were his coffers, never spent upon himself a superfluous farthing, especially in the way of personal adornment; and Colonel Hope would not have felt too warm, cased in sheepskins, for he had spent the best part of his life in India, and was, besides, of a chilly nature.

The colonel had that afternoon been made acquainted with an unpleasant transaction which had occurred in his house. The household termed it a mystery; he, a scandalous robbery: and he had written forthwith to the nearest chief police-station, demanding that an officer might be despatched back with the messenger, to investigate it. So there he was, waiting for their return in impatient expectation, and occasionally halting before the window, to look out on the busy London world.

The officer at length came, and was introduced. The colonel's wife, Lady Sarah, had joined him then; and they proceeded to give him the outline of the case. A valuable diamond bracelet, recently presented to Lady Sarah by her husband, had disappeared in a singular manner. Miss Seaton, the companion to Lady Sarah, had temporary charge of the jewel-box. She had brought it down the previous evening, Thursday, this being Friday, to the back drawing-room, and laid several pairs of bracelets out on a table, ready for Lady Sarah, who was going to the opera, to choose which she would wear when she came up from dinner. Lady Sarah chose a pair, and put, herself, the rest back into the box, which Miss Seaton then locked, and carried to its place upstairs. In the few minutes that the bracelets lay on the table, the most valuable one of all, a diamond, disappeared from it.

"I did not want this to be officially investigated; at least, not so quickly," observed Lady Sarah to the officer. "The colonel wrote for you quite against my wish."

"And so have let the thief get clear off, and put up with the loss!" cried the colonel. "Very fine, my lady."

"You see," added her ladyship, explaining to the officer, "Miss Seaton is a young lady of extremely good family. She is not a common companion; a friend of mine, I may rather say. She is of feeble constitution, and this affair has so completely upset her, that I fear she will be laid on a sick-bed."

"It won't be my fault if she is," retorted the colonel, taking the implied reproach to himself. "The loss of a diamond bracelet, worth two or three hundred guineas, is not to be hushed up. They are not to be bought every day, Lady Sarah."

The officer was taken to the room whence the bracelet disappeared. It presented nothing peculiar. It was a back drawing-room, the folding-doors between it and the front room standing open, the back window, a large one, looking out upon some flat leads. The officer seemed to take in the points of the double room at a glance: its folding-doors of communication, its two doors opening to the corridor outside, and its windows. He examined the latches of the two entrance doors, and he looked next from the front windows, and then from the one at the back. From the front windows ordinary ingress was impossible; it was nearly as much so from the back one. The officer leaned out for some time, but could make nothing of a case. The window was shut in by a balcony that just encircled it. Below, two stories down, were the leads of the kitchens. The house was one of a row of houses, or terrace, and they all bore the same features: the leads running along below; the confining balconies to the windows on this floor above. But the windows could not be gained from the leads except by means of a ladder; and the balconies were not near each other.

"Nothing to be suspected there," concluded the officer, bringing in his head and shoulders. "I should like, if you please, ma'am, to see Miss Seaton."

Lady Sarah went for her, and brought her. A delicate girl with a transparent skin, looking almost too weak to walk. She was in a visible tremor, and shook as she stood before the police officer: whose name, it turned out, was Pullet.

But he was a man of pleasant manners and speech, and he hastened to reassure her. "There's nothing to be afraid of, young lady," said he with a broad smile. "We are not ogres: though I do believe some timid folks look upon us as such. Just please to compose yourself, and tell me as much as you can recollect of this."

"I laid out the bracelets here," began Alice Seaton, putting her hands on the table underneath the window, not more to indicate it than to steady herself, for she was almost incapable of standing. "The diamond bracelet, the one lost, I placed just here," she added, touching the middle of the table at the back, "and the rest I put around it."

"It was worth more than any of the others, I believe, ma'am."

"Much more," growled the colonel.

The officer nodded to himself, and Alice resumed.

"I left the bracelets, and went into the other room and sat down at one of the front windows ——"

"With the intervening doors open, I presume."

"Wide open, as they are now," said Alice. "The other two doors

were shut. Lady Sarah came up from dinner almost directly; and then, as it appears, the bracelet was not there."

"You are quite certain of that?"

"*I* am quite certain," interposed Lady Sarah. "I looked particularly for that bracelet; not seeing it, I supposed Miss Seaton had not laid it out. I chose out a pair, put them on, returned the others to the box, and saw Miss Seaton lock it."

"Then you did not miss the bracelet at that time?" questioned Mr. Pullet.

"I did not miss it in one sense, because I did not know it had been put out," returned her ladyship. "I saw it was not there."

"But did you not miss it?" he asked of Miss Seaton.

"I only reached the table as Lady Sarah was closing the lid of the box," she answered. "Lady Frances Chenevix had detained me in the front room."

"My sister," explained Lady Sarah. "She is on a visit to me, and had come with me up from dinner."

"You say you went and sat in the front room," resumed the officer to Alice, in a quicker tone than he had used previously: "will you show me where?"

Alice did not stir; she only turned her head towards the front room, and pointed to a chair a little drawn away from the window. "In that chair," she said. "It stood as it stands now."

The officer looked baffled. "You must have had the back room full in view from thence; both the door and window."

"Quite so," replied Alice. "If you will sit down in it, you will perceive that I had uninterrupted view, and faced the doors of both rooms."

"I perceive that from here. And you saw no one enter!"

"No one did enter. It was impossible anyone could do so, without my observing it. Had either of the doors been only quietly unlatched, I must have both heard and seen."

"And yet the bracelet vanished!" interposed Colonel Hope. "They must have been confoundedly deep, whoever did it; but thieves are said to possess sleight of hand."

"They are clever enough, some of them," observed the officer.

"Rascally villains! I should like to know how they accomplished this."

"So should I," significantly returned the officer. "At present it appears to me incomprehensible."

There was a pause. The officer seemed to muse; and Alice, happening to look up, saw his eyes stealthily studying her face. It did not tend to reassure her.

"Your servants are trustworthy; they have lived with you some time?" resumed Mr. Pullet, not apparently attaching much importance to what the answer might be.

"Were they all escaped convicts, I don't see that it would throw light on this," retorted Colonel Hope. "If they came into the room to steal the bracelet, Miss Seaton must have seen them."

"From the time you put out the bracelets, to that of the ladies coming up from dinner, how long was it?" inquired the officer of Alice.

"I scarcely know," panted she. What with his close looks and his close questions, her breath was growing short. "I did not take particular notice of the elapse of time: I was not well yesterday evening."

"Was it half an hour?"

"Yes—I daresay—nearly so."

"Miss Seaton," he continued, in a brisk tone, will you have any objection to take an oath before a magistrate—in private, you know—that no person whatever, except yourself, entered either of these rooms during that period?"

Had she been requested to go before a magistrate to testify that she, herself, was the guilty person, it could scarcely have affected her more. Her cheek grew white, her lips parted, and her eyes assumed a beseeching look of terror. Lady Sarah Hope hastily pushed a chair behind her, and drew her down upon it.

"Really, Alice, you are very foolish to allow yourself to be excited about nothing," she remonstrated: "you would have fallen on the floor in another minute. What harm is there in taking an oath privately, when it is to further the ends of justice?"

The officer's eyes were still keenly fixed on Alice Seaton's, and she cowered visibly beneath his gaze. He was puzzled by her evident terror. "Will you assure *me*, on your sacred word, that no person did enter the room?" he repeated, in a low, firm tone; which somehow carried to her the impression that he believed her to be trifling with them.

She looked at him; gasped, and looked again; and then she raised her handkerchief in her hand and wiped her damp and ashy face.

"I think some one did come in," whispered the officer in her ear; "try and recollect who it was." And Alice fell back in hysterics, and was taken from the room.

"Miss Seaton has been an invalid for years; she is not strong like other people," remarked Lady Sarah. "I felt sure we should have a scene of some kind, and that is why I wished the investigation not to be gone into hurriedly."

"Don't you think there are good grounds for an investigation, sir?" testily asked Colonel Hope of the officer.

"I must confess I do think so, colonel," was the reply.

"Of course: you hear, my lady. The difficulty is, how can we obtain the first clue to the mystery?"

"I do not suppose there will be an insuperable difficulty," observed Mr. Pullet. "I believe I have obtained one."

"You are a clever fellow, then," cried the colonel, "if you have obtained it here. What is the clue?"

"Will Lady Sarah allow me to mention it—whatever it may be—without taking offence?" continued the officer, looking at her ladyship.

She bowed her head, wondering much.

"What's the good of standing upon ceremony?" peevishly put in Colonel Hope. "Her ladyship will be as glad as we shall be to get back her bracelet; more glad, one would think. A clue to the thief! Come! who is it?"

Mr. Pullet smiled. When men have been as long in the police force as he had, they give every word its due significance. "I did not say a clue to the thief, colonel: I said a clue to the mystery."

"Where's the difference?"

"Pardon me, it is perceptible. That the bracelet is gone, is a palpable fact: but by whose hands it went, is as yet a mystery."

"What do you suspect?"

"I suspect," returned the officer, lowering his voice, "that Miss Seaton knows how it went."

There was a silence of surprise; on Lady Sarah's part, of indignation.

"Is it possible that you suspect *her?*" uttered Colonel Hope.

"No," said the officer, "I do not suspect herself: she appears not to be a suspicious person in any way: but I believe she knows who the delinquent is, and that fear, or some other motive, keeps her silent. Is she on familiar terms with any of the servants?"

"But you cannot know what you are saying!" interrupted Lady Sarah. "Familiar with the servants! Miss Seaton is a gentlewoman; she has always moved in high society. Her family is little inferior to mine; and better—better than the colonel's," concluded her ladyship, determined to speak out.

"Madam," said the officer, "you must be aware that in an investigation of this nature, we are compelled to put questions which we do not expect to be answered in the affirmative. Colonel Hope will understand what I mean, when I say that we call them 'feelers.' I did not expect to hear that Miss Seaton had been on familiar terms with your servants (though it might have been); but that question, being disposed of, will lead me to another. I suspect that some one did enter the room and make free with the bracelet, and that Miss Seaton must have been cognisant of it. If a common thief, or an absolute stranger, she would have been the first to give the alarm: if not on too familiar terms with the servants, she would be as little likely to screen them. So we come to the question—who could it have been?"

"May I inquire why you suspect this of Miss Seaton?" coldly demanded Lady Sarah.

"Entirely from her manner; from the agitation she displays."

"Most young ladies, particularly in our class of life, would betray

agitation at being brought face to face with a police-officer," urged Lady Sarah.

"My lady," he returned, "we are keen, experienced men; and we should not be fit for the office we hold if we were not. We generally do find lady witnesses betray uneasiness when first exposed to our questions, but in a very short time, often in a few moments, it wears off, and they grow gradually easy. It was not so with Miss Seaton. Her agitation, excessive at first, increased visibly, and it ended as you saw. I did not think it the agitation of guilt, but I did think it that of conscious fear. And look at the related facts: that she laid the bracelets there, never left them, no one came in, and yet the most valuable one vanished. We have many extraordinary tales brought before us, but not quite so extraordinary as that."

The colonel nodded approbation. Lady Sarah began to feel uncomfortable.

"I should like to know whether anyone called whilst you were at dinner," mused the officer. "Can I see the man who attends to the hall door?"

"Thomas attends to that," said the colonel, ringing the bell. "There is a side door, but that is only for the servants and tradespeople."

"I heard Thomas say that Sir George Danvers called while we were at dinner," observed Lady Sarah. "No one else. And Sir George did not go upstairs."

The detective smiled. "If he had, my lady, it would have made the case no clearer."

"No," laughed Lady Sarah, "poor old Sir George would be puzzled what to do with a diamond bracelet."

"Will you tell me," said the officer, wheeling sharply round upon Thomas when he entered, "who it was that called here yesterday evening, while your master was at dinner? I do not mean Sir George Danvers; the other one."

Thomas visibly hesitated: and that was sufficient for the lynx-eyed officer. "Nobody called but Sir George, sir," he presently said.

The detective stood before the man, staring him full in the face with a look of amusement. "Think again, my man," quoth he. "Take your time. There was some one else."

The colonel fell into an explosion: reproaching the unfortunate Thomas with having eaten his bread for five years, to turn round upon the house and its master at last, and act the part of a deceitful, conniving wretch, and let in that swindler ——"

"He is not a swindler, sir," interrupted Thomas.

"Oh no, not a swindler," roared the colonel; "he only steals diamond bracelets."

"No more than I steal 'em sir," again spoke Thomas. "He's not capable, sir. It was Mr. Gerard."

The colonel was struck speechless: his rage vanished, and down he sat in a chair, staring at Thomas. Lady Sarah coloured with surprise.

"Now, my man," cried the officer, "why could you not have said it was Mr. Gerard?"

"Because Mr. Gerard asked me not to say he had been, sir; he is not friendly here, just now; and I promised him I would not. And I'm sorry to have had to break my word."

"Who is Mr. Gerard, pray?"

"He is my nephew," interposed the checkmated colonel. "Gerard Hope."

"But, as Thomas says, he is no swindler," remarked Lady Sarah: "he is not the thief. You may go, Thomas."

"No, sir," stormed the colonel; "fetch Miss Seaton here first. I'll come to the bottom of this. If he has done it, Lady Sarah, I will bring him to trial; though he is Gerard Hope."

Alice came back, leaning on the arm of Lady Francis Chenevix; the latter having been dying with curiosity to come in before.

"So the mystery is out, ma'am," began the colonel to Miss Seaton: "it appears this gentleman was right, and that somebody did come in. And that somebody was the rebellious Mr. Gerard Hope."

Alice was prepared for this, for Thomas had told her Mr. Gerard's visit was known; and she was not so agitated as before. It was the *fear* of its being found out, the having to conceal it, which had troubled her.

"It is not possible that Gerard can have taken the bracelet," said Lady Sarah.

"No, it is not possible," replied Alice. "And that is why I was unwilling to mention his having come up."

"What did he come for?" thundered the colonel.

"It was not an intentional visit. I believe he only followed the impulse of the moment. He saw me at the front window; and Thomas, it appears, was standing at the door. He ran across, and came up."

"I think you might have said so, Alice," observed Lady Sarah, in a stiff tone.

"Knowing he had been forbidden the house, I did not wish to bring him under the colonel's displeasure," was all the excuse Alice could offer. "It was not my place to inform against him."

"I presume he approached sufficiently near the bracelets to touch them, had he wished?" observed the officer, who of course had now made up his mind upon the business—and upon the thief.

"Y—es," returned Alice, wishing she could have said No.

"Did you notice the bracelet there, after he was gone?"

"I cannot say I did. I followed him from the room when he left, and then I went into the front room, so that I had no opportunity of observing the bracelets."

"The doubt is solved," was the mental comment of the detective officer.

The colonel, hot and hasty, sent several servants various ways in search of Gerard Hope, and he was speedily found and brought. A tall and powerful young man, very good-looking.

"Take him into custody, officer," was the colonel's impetuous command.

"Hands off, Mr. Officer—if you are an officer," cried Gerard, in the first shock of the surprise, as he glanced at the gentlemanly appearance of the other, who wore plain clothes. "You shall not touch me, unless you can show legal authority. This is a shameful trick. Colonel—excuse me for speaking plainly—as I owe nothing to you, I do not see that you have any right or power to bring about my arrest."

The group would have made a fine study: especially Gerard, his head thrown back in defiance, and looking angrily at everybody.

"Did you hear me?" cried the colonel.

"I must do my duty," said the police-officer, approaching Gerard. "And for authority—you need not suppose I should act without it."

"Allow me to understand a little first," remarked Gerard, haughtily eluding the officer. "Which is it for? What is the sum total?"

"Two hundred and fifty pounds," growled the colonel. "But if you are thinking to compromise it in that way, young sir, you will find yourself mistaken."

"Oh, no fear," retorted Gerard; "I have not two hundred and fifty pence. Let me see: it must be Dobbs's. A hundred and sixty—how on earth do they slide the expenses up? I did it, sir, to oblige a friend."

"The deuce you did!" echoed the colonel, who understood nothing of the speech except the last sentence. "I never saw a cooler villain in all my experience!"

"He was awfully hard up," went on Gerard, "as much so as I am now; and I did it. I don't deny having done such things on my own account, but from this particular one I did not benefit a shilling."

His calm assurance, and his words, struck them with consternation. You see, he and they were at cross purposes.

"Dobbs said he'd take care I should be put to no inconvenience—and this comes of it! That's trusting your friends. He vowed to me, this very week, that he had provided for the bill."

"He thinks it is only an affair of debt!" screamed Lady Frances Chenevix. "Oh, Gerard! what a relief! We thought you were confessing."

"You are not arrested for debt, sir," explained the officer. "You are apprehended for—in short, it is a case of felony."

"Felony!" echoed Gerard Hope. "Oh, indeed! Could you not make it murder?" he added, with sarcasm.

"Off with him to Marlborough Street, officer," cried the exasperated colonel; "I'll come with you and prefer the charge. He scoffs at it, does he?"

"Yes, that I do," answered Gerard. "Whatever pitfalls I may have walked into, in the way of debt and carelessness, I have not gone in for felony."

"You are accused, sir," said the officer, "of stealing a diamond bracelet."

"Hey!" uttered Gerard, a flash of intelligence rising to his face, as he glanced at Alice. "I might have guessed it was the bracelet affair, if I had had my recollection about me."

"Oh, ho," triumphed the colonel, in sneering jocularity. "So you expected it was the bracelet, did you? We shall have it all out presently."

"I heard of the bracelet's disappearance," said Mr. Hope. "I met Miss Seaton when she was out this morning, and she told me it was gone."

"Better make no admissions," whispered the officer in his ear. "They may be used against you."

"Whatever admissions I may make, you are at liberty to use them," haughtily returned Gerard. "Is it possible that you do suspect me of taking the bracelet, colonel?—or is this a joke?"

"Allow me to say a word," panted Alice, stepping forward. "I—I—did not accuse you, Mr. Hope; I would not have mentioned your name in connection with it, because I am sure you are innocent; but when it was discovered that you had called, I could not deny that you were upstairs while the bracelets lay on the table."

"Of course I was. But the idea of my taking one is absurdly preposterous," went on Gerard, speaking chiefly to the colonel. "Who accuses me?"

"I do," said Colonel Hope.

"Then I am very sorry it is not somebody else, sir, instead of you."

"Explain. Why?"

"Because they should get a kindly taste of my cane across their shoulders."

"Gerard," interrupted Lady Sarah, "do not treat it in that light way. If you did take the bracelet, say so, and you shall be forgiven. I am sure you must have been put to it terribly hard; only confess it, and the matter shall be hushed up."

"No, it shan't, my lady," cried the colonel. "I will not have him encouraged—I mean, felony compounded."

"It shall," persisted Lady Sarah—"it shall indeed. The bracelet was mine, and I have a right to do as I please. Believe me, Gerard, I will put up with the loss without a murmur: only confess, and let the worry be done with."

Gerard Hope looked at her: little trace of shame was there in his countenance. "Lady Sarah," he asked, in a deep tone, "can you indeed deem me capable of taking your bracelet?"

"The bracelet was there, sir; and it went; and you can't deny it," cried the colonel.

"The bracelet was there, sure enough," assented Gerard. "I held it in my hand for two or three minutes, and was talking to Miss Seaton about it. I told her I wished it was mine—and I said what I should do with it if it was."

"Oh, Mr. Hope, pray say no more," involuntarily interrupted Alice.

"What do you want to screen him for?" impetuously broke forth the colonel, turning upon Alice. "Let him say what he was going to say."

"I do not know why I should not say it," Gerard Hope answered, in his spirit of bravado, which he disdained to check. "I said I should pledge it."

"You'll send off to every pawnbroker's in the metropolis, before the night's over, Mr. Officer," cried the choking colonel, breathless with rage. "This beats brass."

"But I did not take it any the more for having said that," put in Gerard, in a graver tone. "The remark might have been made by any one, from a duke downwards, if reduced to his last shifts, as I am. I said *if* it were mine: I did not say I would steal it. Nor did I."

"I saw him put it down again," said Alice Seaton, in a calm, steady voice.

"Allow me to speak a word, colonel," resumed Lady Sarah, interrupting what her husband was about to say. "Gerard—I cannot believe you guilty; but consider the circumstances. The bracelet was there: you acknowledge it: Miss Seaton left the apartment when you did, and went into the front room, and stayed there with the bracelets in view. Yet when I came up from dinner, it was gone."

The colonel would speak. "So it lies between you and Miss Seaton," he put in. "Perhaps you would like us to believe she appropriated it."

"No," answered Gerard, with a flashing eye. "*She* cannot be doubted. I would rather take the guilt upon myself, than allow her to be suspected. Believe me, Lady Sarah, we are both innocent."

"The bracelet could not have gone without hands to take it, Gerard," replied Lady Sarah. "How else do you account for its disappearance?"

"I believe there must be some misapprehension, some great mistake, in the affair altogether, Lady Sarah. It appears incomprehensible now, but it will be unravelled."

"Ay, and in double-quick time," wrathfully exclaimed the colonel. "You must think you are talking to a pack of idiots, Master Gerard. Here the bracelet was spread temptingly out on a table; you went into

the room, being hard up for money, fingered it, wished for it, and both you and the bracelet disappeared. Sir"—turning sharply round to Mr. Pullet—"did a clearer case ever go before a jury?"

Gerard Hope bit his lip. "Be more just, colonel," said he. "Your own brother's son steal a bracelet!"

"And I am happy my brother is not alive to know it," rejoined the colonel, in an obstinate tone. "Take him in hand, Mr. Officer: we'll go to Marlborough Street. I'll just change my coat, and ——"

"No, no, you will not," cried Lady Sarah, laying hold of the dressing-gown and the colonel in it. "You shall not go; or Gerard, either. Whether he is guilty or not, it must not be brought against him publicly. He bears your name, colonel, and so do I, and it would reflect disgrace on us all."

"Perhaps you are made of money, my lady. If so, you may put up with the loss of a two hundred and fifty guinea bracelet. *I* don't choose to do so."

"Then, colonel, you will; and you must. Sir," added Lady Sarah to the detective, "we are obliged to you for your attendance and advice, but it turns out to be a family affair, as you perceive, and we must decline to prosecute. Besides, Mr. Hope may not be guilty."

Alice rose, and stood before Colonel Hope. "Sir, if this charge were preferred against your nephew; if it came to trial; I think it would kill me. You know my unfortunate state of health; the agitation, the excitement of appearing to give evidence would be—I—I cannot continue; I cannot speak of it without terror. I *pray* you, for my sake, do not prosecute Mr. Hope."

The colonel was about to storm forth an answer, but her white face, her heaving throat, had some effect even on him. Perhaps also he was thinking of his dead brother. "He is so doggedly obstinate, you see, Miss Seaton. If he would but confess, and tell where it is, perhaps I'd let him off."

Alice thought somebody else was obstinate. "I do not believe he has anything to confess," she deliberately said; "I truly believe that he has not. He could not have taken it, unseen by me: and when we quitted the room, I feel sure the bracelet was left in it."

"It was," said Gerard. "When I left the room, I left the bracelet in it, so help me Heaven!"

"And, now, I shall speak," put in Frances Chenevix. "Colonel, if you press the charge against Gerard, I will go before the magistrate, and proclaim myself the thief. I vow and protest I will; just to save him. And you and Lady Sarah could not prosecute *me*, you know."

"*You* do well to stand up for him!" retorted the colonel. "You would not be quite so ready to do it, my Lady Fanny, if you knew something I could tell you."

"Oh yes, I should," returned the young lady, with a vivid blush.

The colonel, beset on all sides, had no choice but to submit; but he did so with an ill grace, and dashed out of the room with Mr. Pullet, as fiercely as though he had been charging an enemy at full tilt. "The sentimental apes these women make of themselves!" cried he, in his polite way, when he got Mr. Pullet in private. "Is it not a clear case of guilt?"

"In my private opinion, it certainly is," was the reply; "though he carries if off with a high hand. I suppose, colonel, you still wish the bracelet to be searched for?"

"Search in and out, and high and low; search everywhere. The rascal! to dare even to enter my house in secret!"

"May I be allowed to inquire, colonel, whether the previous estrangement between you and your nephew had anything to do with money matters?"

"No," said the colonel, turning more crusty at the thoughts called up. "I fixed upon a wife for him, and he wouldn't have her; so I turned him out of doors and stopped his allowance."

"Oh," was the only comment of Mr. Pullet.

II.

It was the following week, and Saturday night. Thomas was standing at Colonel Hope's door without his hat, a pastime he much favoured, and chatting to an acquaintance, when he perceived Gerard come tearing up the street. Thomas's friend backed against the rails and the spikes, and Thomas himself stood with the door in his hand, ready to touch his hair to Mr. Gerard, as he passed. Instead of passing, however, Gerard cleared the steps at a bound, pulled Thomas with himself inside, shut the door, and doubled-locked it.

Thomas was surprised in all ways. Not only at Mr. Hope's coming in at all, for the colonel had most solemnly interdicted it, but at the suddenness and strangeness of the action.

"Cleverly done," quoth Gerard, when he could get his breath. "I saw a shark after me, Thomas, and had to make a bolt for it. Your having been at the door saved me."

Thomas turned pale. "Mr. Gerard, you have locked it, and I'll put up the chain, if you order me, but I'm afeared it's going again' the law to keep out them detectives by force of arms."

"What's the man's head running on now?" returned Gerard. "There are no detectives after me: it was only a seedy sheriff's officer. Psha, Thomas! there's no worse crime attaching to me than a slight suspicion of debt."

"I'm sure I trust not, sir: only master will have his own way."

"Is he at home?"

"He is gone to the opera with my lady. The young ladies are up-

stairs alone. Miss Seaton has been ill, sir, ever since the bother, and Lady Frances is staying at home with her."

"I'll go up and see them. If the colonel and my lady are at the opera, we shall be snug and safe."

"Oh, Mr. Gerard, had you better go up, do you think?" the man ventured to remark. "If the colonel should come to hear of it——"

"How can he? You are not going to tell him, and I am sure the young ladies will not. Besides, there's no help for it: I can't go out again, for hours. And, Thomas, if any demon should knock and ask for me, I am gone to—to—an evening party at Putney: went out, you know, by the other door."

Thomas watched him run up the stairs, and shook his head, thinking deeply. "One can't help liking him, with it all: though where could the bracelet have gone to, if he did not take it?"

The drawing-rooms were empty, and Gerard made his way to a small room that Lady Sarah called her boudoir. There they were: Alice buried in the pillows of an invalid chair, and Lady Frances careering about the room, apparently practising some new mode of waltzing. She did not see him: Gerard danced up to her, took her hands and joined in it.

"Oh!" she cried, with a little scream of surprise, "you! Well, I have stayed at home to some purpose. But how could you think of venturing within these sacred and forbidden walls? Do you forget that the colonel threatens us with the terrors of the law, if we suffer you to enter? You are a bold man, Gerard."

"When the cat's away, the mice can play," said Gerard, treating them to a pas seul.

"Mr. Hope!" remonstrated Alice, lifting her feeble voice, "how can you indulge in these spirits, while things are so miserable?"

"Sighing and groaning won't make things light," he answered, sitting down on a sofa near to Alice. "Here's a seat for you, Fanny; come along," he added, pulling Frances to his side. "First and foremost, has anything come to light about that mysterious bracelet?"

"Not yet," sighed Alice. "But I have no rest: I am in hourly fear of it."

"*Fear!*" uttered Gerard, in astonishment.

Alice winced, and leaned her head upon her hand: she spoke in a low tone.

"You must understand what I mean, Mr. Hope. The affair has been productive of so much pain and annoyance to me, that I wish it could be ignored for ever."

"Though it left me under a cloud," said Gerard. "You must pardon me if I cannot agree with you. My constant hope is, that daylight may soon be let in upon it. I assure you I have specially mentioned it in my prayers."

"Pray don't, Mr. Hope!" reproved Alice.

"I'm sure I have cause to mention it, for it is sending me into exile. That, and other things."

"It is the guilty only who flee, not the innocent," said Frances. "You don't mean what you say, Gerard."

"Don't I! There's a certain boat advertised to steam from London-Bridge wharf to-morrow, wind and weather permitting, and it will steam me with it. I am compelled to fly my country."

"Be serious, and say what you mean."

"Seriously, then, I am over head and ears in debt. You know my uncle stopped my allowance in the spring, and sent me—metaphorically speaking—to the dogs. It got wind; ill-news always does; I had a few liabilities, and they have all come down upon me. But for this confounded bracelet affair, there's no doubt the colonel would have settled them; rather than let the name of Hope be dubiously bandied by the public, he would have expended his ire in growls, and then gone and paid up. But that resource is over now; and I go to take up my abode in some renowned colony for desolate Home subjects, beyond the pale of British lock-ups. Boulogne, or Calais, or Dieppe, or Brussels; I don't know which of the four I shall stay in: and there I may be kept for years."

Neither of the young ladies answered immediately. They saw the facts were serious, and that Gerard was only making light of it before them.

"How shall you live?" questioned Alice. "You must live there as well as here: you cannot starve."

"I shall just escape the starving. I am possessed of a trifle; enough to swear by, and keep me on potatoes and salt. Don't you envy me my prospects?"

"When do you suppose you may return?" inquired Lady Frances. "I ask it seriously, Gerard."

"I know no more than you, Fanny. I have no expectations but from the colonel. Should he never relent, I am caged there for good."

"And so you have ventured here to tell us this; and to bid us good-bye?"

"No. I never thought of venturing here," was the candid answer: "how could I tell that the Bashaw would be at the opera? A shark set on me in the street, and I had to run for my life. Thomas happened to be conveniently at the open door, and I rushed in, and saved myself."

"A shark!" exclaimed Alice, her inexperience taking the words literally—"a shark in the street!" Frances Chenevix laughed.

"One with sharp eyes and nimble feet, Alice, speeding after me with a polite invitation from one of the law lords. He is watching outside now."

"How shall you get away?" wondered Frances.

"If the Bashaw comes home before twelve, Thomas must dispose of me somewhere in the lower regions: Sunday is a free day for us, thank goodness. So please to make the most of me, both of you, for it is the last time you will have the privilege. By the way, Fanny, will you do me a favour? There used to be a little book of mine in the glass book-case in the library; my name in it, and a mottled cover: I wish you would go and find it for me."

Lady Frances left the room with alacrity. Gerard immediately bent over Alice, and his tone changed.

"I have sent her away on purpose. She'll be half an hour rummaging, for I have not seen the book there for ages. Alice, one word before we part. You must know that it was for your sake I refused the marriage proposed to me by my uncle: you will not let me go into banishment without a word of hope; a promise of your love to lighten it."

"Oh, Gerard," she eagerly said, "I am so glad you have spoken: I almost think I should have spoken myself, if you had not. Just look at me."

"I am looking at you," he fondly answered.

"Then look at my hectic face; my constantly tired limbs; my sickly hands: do they not plainly tell you that the topics you would speak of must be barred topics to me?"

"Why should they be? You will get stronger."

"Never. There is no hope of it. Many years ago, when the illness first came upon me, the doctors said I might grow better with time, but the time has come, and come, and come, and——gone; and it has only left me a more confirmed invalid. To an old age I cannot live; most probably but a few years; ask yourself, Gerard, if I am one who ought to marry, and leave behind a husband to regret me; perhaps children. No, no."

"You are cruel, Alice."

"The cruelty would be, if I selfishly allowed you to talk of love to me; or, still more selfishly, let you cherish hopes that I would marry. When you hinted at this, the other evening, the evening that wretched bracelet was lost, I reproached myself with cowardice, in not answering more plainly than you had spoken. I should have told you, Gerard as I tell you now, that nothing, no persuasion from even the dearest person on earth, shall ever induce me to marry."

"You dislike me. I see that."

"I did not say so," answered Alice, with a glowing cheek. "I think it very possible that—if I could allow myself ever to dwell on such things—I should like you very much; perhaps better than I could like anyone."

"And why will you not?" he persuasively uttered.

"Gerard, I have told you. I am too weak and sickly to be other than I am. It would be a sin, in me, to indulge hopes of it: it would only be deceiving myself and you. No, Gerard, my love and hopes must lie elsewhere."

"Where?" he eagerly asked.

Alice pointed upwards. "I am learning to look upon it as my home," she whispered, "and I must not suffer hindrances to obscure the way. It will be a better home than even your love, Gerard."

Gerard Hope smiled. "*Even* than my love: Alice, you like me more than you admit. Unsay your words, my dearest, and give me hope."

"Do not vex me," she resumed, in a pained tone; "do not seek to turn me from my duty. I—I—though I scarcely like to speak of these sacred things, Gerard—*I have put my hand on the plough:* even you cannot turn me back."

He did not answer; he only played with the hand he held between both of his.

"Tell me one thing, Gerard: it will be safe. Was not the dispute about Frances Chenevix?"

He contracted his brow; and nodded.

"And you could refuse her! You must learn to love her, for she would make you a good wife."

"Much chance there is now of my making a wife of anyone!"

"Oh, this will blow over in time: I feel it will. Meanwhile ——"

"Meanwhile you destroy every hopeful feeling I thought to take with me to cheer me in my exile," was his impatient interruption. "I love you alone, Alice; I have loved you for months, truly, fervently; and I know you must have seen that I did."

"Love me still, Gerard," she softly answered, "but not with the love you would give to one of earth; the love you will give—I hope—to Frances Chenevix. Think of me as one rapidly going; soon to be gone."

"Oh, not yet!" he cried, in an imploring tone, as if it were as she willed.

"Not just yet: I hope to see you return from exile. Let us say farewell while we are alone."

She spoke the last sentence hurriedly, for footsteps were heard. Gerard snatched her to him, and laid his face upon hers.

"What cover did you say the book had?" demanded Frances Chenevix of Gerard, who was then leaning back on the sofa, apparently waiting for her. "A mottled? I cannot see one anything like it."

"No? I am sorry to have given you the trouble, Fanny. It has gone, perhaps, amongst the 'have-beens.'"

"Listen," said Alice, removing her hand from before her face, "I hear a carriage stopping. Can they have come home?"

Frances and Gerard flew into the next room, whence the street could be seen. A carriage had stopped, but not at their house. "It is too early for them yet," said Gerard.

"I am sorry things go so cross just now with you, Gerard," whispered Lady Frances. "You will be very dull, over there."

"Ay; fit to hang myself, if you knew all. And the bracelet may turn up, and Lady Sarah be sporting it on her arm again, and I never know that the cloud is off me. No chance that any of you will be at the trouble of writing to a fellow."

"I will," said Frances. "Whether the bracelet turns up, or not, I will write to you sometimes, if you like, Gerard, and give you all the news."

"You are a good girl, Fanny," returned he, in a brighter accent, "and I will send you my address as soon as I possess one. You are not to turn proud, mind, and be off the bargain, if you find it to be au cinquième."

Frances laughed. "Take care of yourself, Gerard."

He took leave of them, and got out by the aid of Thomas, contriving to elude the shark. And the next day the friendly steamer conveyed him into exile on other shores. The prevalent opinion at Colonel Hope's was, that he paid his expenses with the proceeds of the diamond bracelet.

(To be concluded next month.)

INTO THY HANDS, OH LORD!

The night is dark, tempestuous and drear,
A night of danger and of mortal fear;
But while the storm
Is wildly raging round my trembling home,
I clasp my hands upon my breast,
And looking upward sink to peaceful rest,
Breathing the words "Into Thy hands, oh Lord,
My spirit I commend." I trust Thy word
That those are safe who rest their all on Thee,
Though tempests shake the earth and toss the sea.

LISTENING FOR THE GHOST.

THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST 1, 1874.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BACK AGAIN AT PARK NEWTON.

GENERAL ST. GEORGE'S health improved so rapidly that, contrary to his first intention, he decided that he would return to England at once and, if possible, get settled down somewhere by Christmas. As he was running his eye through the *Times* one day he saw, to his intense astonishment, that Park Newton was advertised to be let. By the next post he sent a brief note to Kester, calling his attention to the advertisement, and asking him the meaning of it. In due course he received the following reply.

"My dear Uncle,—The advertisement to which you allude has no other meaning than is visible on the surface of it. Park Newton is empty, and empty it will remain as far as I am concerned. Why not, therefore, try to find a tenant for it, and make at the same time a welcome addition to my income? I know what you will say—that, as the head of the family, it is my duty to live in the family home. That is very well from your point of view, but to me the place is burdened with a memory so terrible (which time can never efface or cause to fade from my mind) that for me to live there is a sheer impossibility.

"But, apart from all this, I think you know me sufficiently well to feel sure that to me a country life would soon become insupportable. After the first freshness had worn off—after I had eaten some of my own peaches and drunk some of my own buttermilk—after I had been duly coached by my bailiff in the mysteries of subsoils and top-dressings, whatever they may be—and after going through all the dull round of bucolic hospitality: I should be sure to cut the whole affair in disgust some fine day, and not recover my peace of mind till after a dinner at the *Trois Frères* and a little box at the *Gymnase.*

"So, my dear uncle, should you happen to hear of any eligible individual who would be content to pass his days among the dull but respectable commonplaces of English country life, pray try to secure him as a tenant forPark Newton, and render grateful for ever—your affectionate nephew, KESTER ST. GEORGE.

"P.S. You say nothing in your note as to the state of your health. May I take it in this case that no news is good news, and that you are stronger and better than when I saw you last? I hope so with all my heart."

To this General St. George sent the following answer:

"Dear Nephew,—*I* will become the tenant of Park Newton. If one member of the family doesn't choose to live there, all the more reason why another should. No stranger shall call the old roof-tree his home while I am alive. I am better in health, thank Heaven, and you will probably see me in England before Christmas.—Yours,

"ARTHUR ST. GEORGE."

In taking this step General St. George was guided as much by Richard Dering's wishes as by his own inclinations in the matter. "Nothing could have fallen out more opportunely for the purpose I have in view," Richard had said to him when the advertisement was first noticed.

"I can't see in what way it will assist your views for you to immure yourself at Park Newton," said the General.

"I shall be there, on the spot itself," answered Richard; "and that seems to me one of the first essentials."

"You fairly puzzle me," said the General, with a shake of the head. "I can't see what more you can do than you have done already. It seems to me like groping in the dark."

"You are right, uncle—it is like groping in the dark. And yet I feel as sure as that I am standing here at the present moment that sooner or later a ray of light will be vouchsafed to me from somewhere. As to when and how it will come, I know nothing; but that it will come, if I clothe my soul with patience, I never for one moment doubt."

"My poor boy! But why not let well alone? You are wasting your life in the chase of a phantom. Be content with what you have achieved already."

"Never—never—so help me Heaven! I will go on groping in the dark, as you call it, till in that dark I clutch my enemy's hand—and drag out of it into the full light of day the man on whose head lies the innocent blood of Percy Osmond."

"A waste of youth, of hope, of happiness," said the old soldier sadly.

"For me there is neither youth, nor hope, nor happiness, till my task is accomplished. Uncle Arthur, I have set myself to do this thing, and no power on earth can move me from it."

"I am heart and soul with you, boy, as you know full well already. But at times it does seem to me as if you were following nothing better than a deceptive will-o'-the-wisp, which, the further you follow it, the further it will lead you astray."

"No will-o'-the-wisp, uncle, but a steadfast-shining star; blood-red like Mars, if you will, but a guide across the pathless waste which leads to the goal I have set myself to obtain."

Three weeks later General St. George and his nephew were settled at Park Newton, while Mrs. Garside and Edith installed themselves in a pretty little cottage half a mile beyond the park gates, but on the side opposite to Duxley.

Lionel Dering's marriage was still kept a profound secret: and as Edith, during the short time she had lived at Duxley, had never gone out without a thick veil over her face, there was not much fear that she would be recognized in her new home. Richard Dering rode over to the Cottage every other day, and we may be sure that Jane Culpepper was also a frequent visitor. Equally a matter of course was it that Tom Bristow, by the merest chance in the world, should often call in during the very time that Miss Culpepper was there: for Providence is kind to lovers and seems often to arrange meetings for them without their taking any trouble to do so on their own account.

Not a single day—nay, not a single hour had Kester St. George spent at Park Newton since his accession to the property. He had been down to Duxley on two occasions and had taken up his quarters at the Royal Hotel, where his steward had waited upon him for the transaction of necessary business, and where the chief tenants of the estate had been invited to a banquet at his expense. But not once had he set foot even inside the park gates. He hated the place, the neighbourhood, the people. London and Paris, according to his view, were the only places fit for a man of fortune to live in, and it was from the latter place that he despatched a letter to his uncle, half ironical in tone, congratulating that veteran on his choice of the ancestral roof-tree for his future home, and hoping that he might live for fifty years to enjoy it. The general smiled grimly to himself as he read the letter and tossed it over to Richard.

"Uncle, you must invite him here before we are many weeks older," said the latter.

"But he hates the place and won't come."

"He hates the place undoubtedly, but he will come all the same if you couch your invitation properly."

"In what terms would you like me to couch it?"

"Pardon me for saying so, but you have only got to hint that you feel you are growing old, and that you have serious thoughts of making your will before long, and then press him to come and see you."

"And you think the bait will tempt him?"

"I am sure of it. Your property would make a nice addition to his income. He would be the most dutiful and affectionate of nephews as long as you lived; he would bury you with every outward semblance of regret; and a month later there would be another hunter in his stable at Newmarket."

"Faith, I believe you're right, Dick. But not a single penny of my money will ever go to Kester St. George. All the same, I'll write the letter in the way you wish it to be written, when you tell me the time for sending it has come."

"We will let Christmas get quietly over, and then we will talk about it again."

But once again the General was puzzled. "I'm bothered if I can comprehend why you want to invite Kester to Park Newton," he said. "You hate the man, and yet you want me to ask him to come and stop under the same roof with you, where you must, out of common courtesy, meet him once or twice every day all the time he is here."

"The coming of Kester St. George to Park Newton is merely another link in the chain of evidence, which Bristow and I together are trying to forge out of the very poor materials at our command. It may prove in the end to be nothing better than a chain of sand—or it may prove strong enough to drag a murderer to his doom."

The General shuddered slightly. "Your words are very strong, my boy," he said. "I have seen so many tragedies in the course of the sixty years I have lived in this world that I have no desire ever to see another—least of all among those of my own kith and kin."

Richard did not answer at once. He rose from his chair, went to the window, and stood gazing out across the frosty landscape. At length he spoke gravely, almost sadly.

"My hand is put to the plough, uncle, and I cannot—I dare not draw back."

"No doubt you are right, and I am wrong," said the General meekly. "But I sometimes tremble when I look into the future, and ask myself what all these disguises and plottings have for their aim and object."

"They have but one aim and one object," said Richard sternly, "both of which are comprised in one word—and that word is Retribution."

"'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord,'" said the old soldier in a reverent whisper.

A deep sigh came from the bosom of the younger man. Again he paused before answering. "Oh, uncle! is there no pity, no thought for me?" he said. "Think of what I have suffered, of all that I have undergone! Name, wealth, position, lost to me for ever unless I can prove I am not the murderer that the world believed me to be. My very identity gone. Obliged to die and be buried, and assume the name and identity of another man; or live the life of a hunted animal, with a price set on my head, and with the ever-present shadow of a

shameful death eating the life out of me inch by inch. Oh, think of all and pity me!"

"I have thought of it all, day and night, night and day, for months. You know that I pity you from the bottom of my soul."

"Had it not been for you, and Edith, and Bristow—God bless him! I should have shot myself long ago."

"Don't talk in that way, Dick—don't talk in that way!"

"Unless—unless I had taught myself to live for the sake of retribution," went on the other as if he had not heard his uncle's words. "And retribution is not vengeance; it is simple repayment—simple justice." He paused like one deep in thought.

"Do you know, uncle," he resumed with a startling change of tone, "do you know that a night hardly ever passes without my being visited by Percy Osmond. His cold hand touches mine and I awake to see him standing close beside me. He never speaks, he only looks at me. But oh! that look—so pleading, so reproachful, so soul-imploring! Awake and asleep it haunts me ever. It is a look that says, 'How much longer shall I lie in my blood-stained shroud, and justice not be done upon my murderer?' It is a look that says, 'Another day gone by and nothing done—nothing discovered.' Then he fades gradually, and I see no more of him till next night; but my hand remains numb and cold for more than an hour after he has left me."

The General was staring at Richard as if he could hardly believe the evidence of his ears. "Come," he said very gently, "let us take a turn in the garden. The air of this room is oppressive. Give me your arm, boy. This English winter finds out the weak places in an old man's joints."

As they paced the garden arm in arm, Richard (or Lioncl—for Lionel it was, as the reader will long ago have surmised) went back to the topic he had last been talking about. "Were I to tell to a physician what I have just told you," he said, "he would simply put me down as the victim of a mental hallucination; he would tell me that I was suffering from a by no means uncommon form of cerebral excitement. So be it. I suppose I am the victim of a mental hallucination: but call it by what name you will, to me it is a most serious and terrible reality—a visitation that no medicines, no society, no change of scene, can alter or rid me of; that one thing alone can rid me of. When I have accomplished the bitter task that is appointed me to do, then, and then only, will this burden be lifted off my soul: then, and not till then, will Percy Osmond cease to visit me." Again he sighed deeply. The General pressed the arm that held his a little more tightly but did not speak. The case was beyond his simple skill. He was powerless to comfort or console the bruised spirit by his side. In silence they finished their walk.

But comfort and consolation were not altogether denied to Lionel

Dering. Edith, and she alone, had power to charm away the cloud rom off his brow, the shadow from off his heart. For the time being, all his troubles and anxieties were forgotten. For a little while, when with her, he would seem like the Lionel Dering of other days: buoyant, hopeful, full of energy, and glad with the promise of the happy future before him. But when he had kissed her and said good-night, long before he reached Park Newton, the cloud would be back again as deep as before. The burden which, as he firmly believed, had been laid upon his shoulders seemed to grow heavier from day to day. "Oh that I could cast it from me!" he would often say to himself with a sort of anguish. "Why did I not go to the other side of the world at first? There peace and obscurity would have been mine. But it is too late now—too late!"

CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. MACDERMOT WANTS HER MONEY.

SQUIRE CULPEPPER was laid up with an attack of his old enemy the gout. Thereby his temper was by no means improved. But to the ordinary pains which attend podagra was superadded another source of irritation and alarm. The shares of the Alcazar Silver Mining Company, in which promising speculation the Squire had invested the whole of his savings, had of late been going down slowly but steadily in the market. It was altogether unaccountable. They had no sooner reached the high-water point of value than they began to fall. But the difficulty had been to know when the high-water mark was reached. The Squire had bought at a low figure—at a remarkably low figure—and when, subsequently, the shares had risen so tremendously in value, he had often been tempted to sell out and realize. But the temptation to keep holding on, in the hope of being able to realize still larger profits, had hitherto proved the stronger of the two.

At first he had looked upon the decline as being merely one of those ordinary market fluctuations such as even the best securities are liable to at times. But at length he took alarm and wrote to his friend Mr. Bird, the secretary of the company, and the man who had persuaded him to invest so heavily in Alcazar securities.

To the Squire's letter Mr. Bird replied as under:

"My dear Mr. Culpepper,—Your note of yesterday did not surprise me in the least. I quite expected to hear from you some days ago respecting the fall in Alcazars. Several other shareholders have either written to me or seen me on the same subject. The truth is that the partisans of a rival company (a company, be it said, whose shares have never yet risen to par and are never likely to do so) have been doing heir best to injure us by spreading abroad a report that a sudden rruption of water had put a stop to all our workings for an indefinite

length of time. The whole affair is an infamous canard, having no other object than to discredit us in the opinion of the public. Unfortunately it is next to impossible to bring such things home to any particular individual, but I have every reason to believe that one or two who are most deeply implicated in this scandalous affair have been buying heavily for the rise which is sure to take place in a few days from the present time; and I strongly advise you, my dear sir, to follow their example. You cannot possibly do better. So satisfied am I on that point, that within the last few days I have invested every spare shilling of my own in Alcazars.

"In conclusion, I may just state that according to advices from our South American managers up to the latest date, received by me per last night's mail, the mine was never in so flourishing a condition as at the present moment.

"It is with the utmost confidence that I look forward to the declaration of a dividend and bonus equivalent in the gross to seventy five per cent, at the close of the current half-year.

"I remain, my dear Mr. Culpepper, very truly yours,

"THEODORE BIRD."

This letter allayed the Squire's fears and kept him quiet for several days. Strange to say, however, the Alcazars still kept steadily declining, and at length the old man became seriously alarmed. He wrote again to Mr. Bird, but this time there came no answer. For five days he waited in such a state of mental agony as he had never known before. He would have gone up to London himself, in order to see Mr. Bird, but by this time the gout had laid hold of him so severely that it was quite impossible for him to venture out of the house. What to do he knew not. No one, not even his daughter, knew how, or in what speculation, he had invested his money, and yet it was evident that he must now take some one into his confidence in the matter, or else be prepared to let the Alcazars go up or down at their own sweet will, and accept the result, whatever it might be, when he should be sufficiently recovered to attend to business himself. But in the face of matters, as they now stood, that was more than he could afford to do—it was more than he dare do. Where, then, was the person on whose honour, discretion, and good business knowledge he could safely rely to assist him in the dilemma in which he now found himself? He had employed five or six brokers at different times during the last eighteen months to buy stock for him, but he had no particular knowledge of, or confidence in, any of them. In Mr. Bird himself he had always placed the most implicit confidence, but that confidence had been severely shaken of late. Bird had originally been a protégé of his own, and had been placed by him as a junior clerk in Mr. Cope's bank. There he had remained for years, gradually

working his way up, and always very grateful to the Squire for the interest that he had taken in his welfare. Then came an advantageous removal to London, after which the Squire lost sight of him for several years. When he next turned up it was as secretary to the Alcazar Mining Company, and as promoter of several other speculative schemes, with a fine house in the Regent's Park, a capital cellar of wines, and a pair of steppers in his brougham that a duchess might have been proud of. The Squire went to dine with him. Mr. Bird did not fail delicately to insinuate that to Mr. Culpepper's generous kindness in giving him such an excellent start in life he attributed all his after success, and that the blessings by which he was now surrounded owed their origin to the Squire alone. Before the day was over, Mr. Culpepper had agreed to invest a very considerable sum in Alcazar stock.

Squire Culpepper's income, considering his position and influence, was anything but a large one. It amounted in all to very little more than three thousand a year. The estate itself was strictly entailed, all but one corner of it, which had been bought by the late Squire and added to it. It was in this corner that the present Squire had proposed to build his new mansion. But unless the Alcazar shares should rise very much again in public favour, there would be no funds forthcoming wherewith to build a new mansion, or even to repair the old one.

Out of this income of three thousand a year the Squire had always contrived to save something; and thus, little by little, he had gradually accumulated some twenty thousand pounds. This was to be Jane's dowry when she should marry. It was in the hope of being able to turn this twenty thousand into sixty or seventy thousand that had been his first inducement to speculate; and had he sold out when the Alcazars were at the flood-tide of their success, not only would this hope have been realized, but what to many had seemed an idle boast, that before long he would have built for him a new and a more magnificent Pincote, would have become a substantial reality.

These golden prospects, however, these magnificent castles in the air, had of late been losing their brightness and were fast resolving themselves into the misty cloud-land from which they had sprung. Very loth, indeed, was the Squire to let them go. Buoyed up by Mr. Bird's letter, he had deferred from day to day the painful act of selling out, still clinging with desperate tenacity to his cloudy battlements, and trying with all his might to believe that the frown which fortune had of late put on had been merely assumed to frighten him for a little while, and that behind it her golden smile was still lurking, and ready at any time to shine on him again.

But, by-and-by, there came a day when the Alcazars, still bent on going down, reached at one fell plunge a lower deep than they had ever dropped to before. Next morning they were quoted in the lists at

ten shillings per share less than they had been on the day when Squire Culpepper, allured by their fatal beauty, ventured on his first investment.

The London papers reached Pincote about luncheon time; and on this particular day the Squire, with his leg swathed in flannel, was just discussing a basin of chicken broth when the post came in. With eager fingers that trembled with excitement he tore off the wrapper, turned to the City article, and there read the fatal news. The blow was so stunning that for a little while he could scarcely realize it. He pushed away his basin of broth untasted. His head drooped into his hands, and bitter tears sprang to his eyes. For the first time since his wife's death the old man cried.

With his newspapers had come several letters, but they all lay untouched beside him for more than an hour. By-and-by he roused himself sufficiently from his abstraction to turn them listlessly over, and then to take them up one after another and stare at their superscriptions with glazed, incurious eyes. There was only one, and it was the last one that he took up, which roused his dull senses to any sign of recognition. "This must be from Fanny," he said. "I'd swear to her writing anywhere. All the way from Ems, too. Still as fond of those nauseous German waters as ever she was. No wonder she's never well." Then his thoughts reverted to his loss, and with a sigh he dropped the letter on the table.

Two or three minutes later a sudden colour flushed his cheeks, and with nervous fingers he sought on the table for the letter from Ems.

"She—she can't be writing for her money!" he said with a gasp. Then he tore open the letter. This is what he read therein :

"My dear Brother,—I hope that this will find you quite well, although you were never the man to give me the least credit for caring about your health. I hope to be in England in the course of another fortnight, when I shall at once make my way to Pincote. I presume that I shall not be looked upon as an intruder if I ask you to find me a bed for a few nights. Goodness knows it is not often I trouble you, and I am sure Jane must have many things to talk about to me, who am her nearest living female relative. As regards the five thousand pounds which I desired you to invest for me, or make use of in any way that might seem most desirable under the circumstances, I shall be glad if you will arrange to hand it over to me, together with any amount that may have accrued to it for interest, immediately upon my arrival at Pincote. I have decided to invest all my available funds in real estate: nothing else seems permanent and safe in these days of chances and changes. For my part, I sha'n't be a bit surprised if within the next ten years we see the guillotine as hard at work again as ever it was in the dreadful days of the First Revolution. I think it right to let

you know about the money so that you may be prepared. Give my love to Jane. I hope her hair is no longer that intolerable red that it used to be. The resources of art are many and various, and something could doubtless be done for her. But I must talk to her about all these matters when I see her, although I am afraid that nothing can ever make her pretty. Believe me your loving sister,

"FANNY MCDERMOTT.

"P.S.—Don't give me a bedroom that faces either the east or the north: and not too many stairs to climb."

Jane Culpepper, coming into the room a quarter of an hour later, found her father lying in a sort of heap in his chair and quite unconscious. He was carried to bed; and Doctor Davidson was quickly on the spot. The attack, although sufficiently alarming, was pronounced to be not immediately dangerous, and in about a couple of hours the Squire had thoroughly recovered consciousness. His first words, whispered in Jane's ear, were, "Send for young Bristow." Jane could hardly believe that she had heard aright, and bent her head again that her father might repeat his words. Then, wondering greatly, she sent off a brief note to Tom, asking him to come up to Pincote with as little delay as possible. Two hours later Tom was there.

By this time the Squire was sufficiently recovered to be able to sit up in bed and talk in a feeble, querulous way, very different from his ordinary bluff, hearty style. Why he had sent for Tom he could not have told any one: he did not know himself. Tom's name had sprung instinctively to his lips while he was yet only half conscious—a pretty sure proof that Tom's image must have been in his thoughts previously.

"Bristow," he said feebly as he held his hand out to Tom, "I want you to do me a favour."

"You may command me, sir, in any and every way," was Tom's hearty answer.

"I have invested a considerable amount of money in the Alcazar Silver Mining Company."

"Ah!" interjected Tom, and his face lengthened visibly.

"The shares have been going down for this month past—not that I have by any means lost confidence in them—and I want you to go up to London for me, being laid up myself with this cursed gout, and inquire personally into the stability of the concern. I won't conceal from you that I am slightly anxious and uneasy, although I have Bird's word for it—clever fellow, Bird, very: you ought to know him—that the present panic is merely a temporary affair, and that the shares will go up again, in a few days, higher than they have ever been yet. In any case, there can be no harm in your making a few private inquiries on my behalf, and reporting the result to me. You are not very busy, I

suppose, and you could go up to town—when?" His tone was very anxious as he asked this question.

"By the next train," answered Tom.

"Good boy—good boy!" said the Squire gratefully. "And you'll telegraph me, won't you? Don't wait to write, but telegraph to me."

"Don't think me impertinent if I ask you to tell me the extent of your liabilities as regards the Alcazar Mining Company."

"Why—ah—I cannot tell you to a fraction. A few thousands, I suppose. But I don't see how that fact can interest you."

Tom's long face grew still longer. "Don't you think, sir," he said, "that it might be advisable for you to empower me to sell out your stock in your behalf, should I find on inquiry to-morrow that there is the least likelihood of its sinking any lower than it is now?"

"Sell out!" exclaimed the Squire in horror. "Certainly not. What next, pray? Bird said the shares were sure to go up again, and I'll pin my faith to Bird through thick and thin."

It was with a sad heart that Tom left Pincote. He knew something of the Alcazar Mining Company and he had no faith in its stability. He knew something of Mr. Bird, the secretary, and he had no faith in his honesty.

Mrs. McDermott was Squire Culpepper's only sister. She had been a widow for several years. She was perpetually travelling about, ostensibly in search of health, but really in search of change and excitement. The money about which she was writing to her brother was a sum of five thousand pounds which she had put into his hands some two or three years previously, with a request that he would invest it for her in some way, or put it to whatever use he might deem most advisable. He had managed her monetary affairs for her ever since her husband's death, and there was nothing strange in such a request. At first the amount had been invested in railway debentures, which brought in a modest four per cent. But when the Alcazar shares began to rise so rapidly, it seemed to the Squire that he would have been wronging his sister had he neglected to let her participate in the wonderful golden harvest that lay so close to his hand. To have written to her on the subject would have been the merest matter of form. She would only have answered, "Don't bother me, but do as you like with the money till I want it for something else." Then what a glorious surprise it would be to her to find that her little fortune had actually trebled and quadrupled itself in so short a space of time! Nothing venture nothing win. The railway debentures were at once disposed of and Alcazar shares bought in their stead; and the Squire chuckled to himself many a time when he thought of his happy audacity in acting as he had done without consulting anyone except his friend Mr. Bird.

But in proportion to his previous exultation was the dread which now chilled his heart, that not only might his daughter's dowry be lost to her

for ever, but that his sister's money also—the savings of many years—might be sunk beyond recovery in the wreck that now seemed so close at hand. Most people under such circumstances would have telegraphed to their brokers to sell out at every risk; but there was a mixture of hopefulness and obstinacy in the Squire's disposition that made him cling to his purpose with a tenacity that would go far either to ruin him or make his fortune, as the case might be.

Tom Bristow did not reach London till long after business hours, but so anxious was he with regard to the matter which had taken him there, that he could not sit down comfortably and wait till morning before beginning his inquiries. After spending ten minutes at his hotel he took a hansom and drove off at once to the offices of the Alcazar Mining Company. The private watchman whose duty it was to look after the premises at night at once supplied him with Mr. Bird's address, and half an hour later Tom found himself in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park. Mr. Bird's house was readily found, but Mr. Bird himself was not at home, as a rough-looking man with a short pipe in his mouth who, somewhat to Tom's surprise, answered his impatient knock, at once told him.

"Where is Mr. Bird, and when can I see him?" asked Tom.

"As to where he is—I should say that by this time he's some hundreds of miles on his way to America or Australia. As to when you can see him—why, you can see him when you can catch him and not before."

"Then he's gone?" said Tom incredulously.

"Yes, sir, he's gone. The nest's empty and the bird's flown," added the man with a grin at his own witticism; "and the whole blessed concern has gone to smash."

"And the Squire will expect a telegram from me to-night!" muttered Tom.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FOOTSTEPS IN THE ROOM.

DURING the few months that elapsed between the murder of Percy Osmond and the arrival of General St. George in England, Park Newton had been shut up, Pearce, the old family butler, being left as custodian of the house. Of the former establishment he was allowed to retain his niece, Miss Piper, who had been still-room maid, and Finch, formerly a footman, but afterwards promoted to be Mr. Dering's body-servant; together with a woman or two to do the rough work of the house.

When the General fixed his home at Park Newton these people were all retained in their places, but their numbers were augmented b

eight or ten more. All his life the General had been used to be waited upon by a number of people, and he could not quite get out of the way of it even in England.

On a certain wintry evening early in the new year, Finch and Miss Piper were sitting in the drawing-room toasting their toes before a seasonable fire. Between them was a small table on which stood a decanter of Madeira and two glasses, together with a dish of apples, nuts, and oranges. The family had gone out to dinner, and would not be home till late; Mr. Pearce had driven into Duxley to pay the tradesmen's accounts, and for the time being Mr. Finch and his fair companion commanded the situation.

Miss Piper wore a dress of rustling plum-coloured silk. At her elbow was a smelling-bottle and a lace-edged handkerchief. Mr. Finch, with one of General St. George's snuff-boxes by his side, was lounging in his easy chair, with all the graceful nonchalance of an old club-man who has just partaken of an excellent dinner.

"This Madeira is not so bad," he said condescendingly, as he swallowed his third glass at a gulp with the gusto of a connaisseur. "Miss Piper," refilling his glass, "I look towards you. Here's your very good health. May you live long and die happy."

"Oh, Mr. Finch, deeply gratified, I'm sure."

"I must have fallen into a doze just now, because I never heard you when you opened the door, and was quite startled when I saw you standing beside me. But then you always do go about the house more quietly than anybody else—except the ghost himself."

Miss Piper glanced round with a shudder, and hitched her chair a little nearer the fire and Mr. Finch. "But surely, Mr. Finch," she said, "you are not one of those who believe that Park Newton is haunted? Uncle Pearce says that he never heard of such rubbish in the whole course of his life."

"Can a man doubt the evidence of his own senses, ma'am? I have lived in too many good families to have any imagination: I am matter-of-fact to the back-bone. Such being the case, what then? Why simply this, Miss Piper: that I know for a fact this house is haunted. Haven't I heard noises myself?"

"Gracious goodness! What kind of noises, Mr. Finch?"

"Why—er—rumblings and grumblings, and—er—moanings and scratchings. And haven't I woke up in the middle of the night, and sat up in bed, and listened and heard strange noises that couldn't be made by anything mortal? And then in the dusk of evening, haven't I seen the curtains move, and heard feet come pitter-pattering down the stairs; and far-away doors clash in the dark as if shut by ghostly hands? Dreadful, I assure you."

"You make me feel quite nervous!" cried Miss Piper, edging an inch nearer.

"The old clock on the second landing has never kept right time since the night of the murder. And didn't Mary Ryan swear that she saw Mr. Percy Osmond coming downstairs one evening, in his blood-stained shirt?—asking your pardon, Miss Piper, for mentioning such a garment before a lady. These are facts that can't be got over. But there's worse to follow."

"Whatever do you mean, Mr. Finch?"

"At first the house was haunted by one ghost, but now they do say there's two of them."

"Oh, lor! Two! And whose is the second one?"

"Why, whose ghost should it be but that of our late master, Mr. Lionel Dering? Five servants have left in six weeks, and I shall give warning next Saturday."

"My nerves are turning to jelly," returned Miss Piper. "Oh, Mr. Finch, we should be dull indeed at Park Newton if you were to go away!"

"Then why not go with me and make my life one long happiness? You know my feelings, you know that I ——"

"No more of that, Mr. Finch, if you please. I know your feelings, and you know my sentiments. Nothing can ever change them. But don't let us talk any more nonsense. I want you to tell me about the ghosts."

"I don't know that I've much more to tell," said Finch, in a mortified tone.

"But about Mr. Dering—Mr. Lionel, I mean? Which of the servants was it that saw his ghost?"

"I am unable to give you any details, Miss Piper, as I never condescend to listen to the gossip of my inferiors; but I believe it to be the general talk in the servants' hall that the ghost of Mr. Lionel has been seen three or four times slowly pacing the big corridor by moonlight."

"How were the idiots to know that it was Mr. Lionel Dering?" asked Piper with a toss of the head. "Not one of them ever saw him when he was alive."

"Yes, Jane Minnows saw him in court during the trial, and she knew the ghost the moment she saw it."

"But then Jane Minnows was a terrible storyteller and just as likely as not to invent all about the ghost simply to get herself talked about. But tell me, Mr. Finch, have you not noticed the remarkable likeness that exists between Mr. Richard Dering and his poor brother?"

"As a gentleman of discernment, Miss Piper, I have noticed the likeness of which you speak. He has the very same nose, the very same hands, the very same way of sitting in his chair. And then the voice! I give you my word of honour that when Mr. Richard yesterday called out rather suddenly 'Finch,' you might have knocked me

down with a cork. It sounded for all the world as if my poor master had come back from the grave, and had called to me just as he used to do."

"You are not one of those, Mr. Finch, who believed in the guilt of Mr. Dering?"

"I never did believe in it and I never will to the last day of my life," said Finch sturdily. "No one, who knew Mr. Lionel as I knew him, could harbour such a thought for a single moment."

"Uncle Pearce says exactly the same as you say. 'No power on earth could make me believe it.' Them's his very words. But I say, Mr. Finch, isn't the old General a darling?"

"Yes, Miss Piper, I approve of the General—I approve of him very much indeed. But Mr. Kester St. George is a sort of person whom I would never condescend to engage as my employer. I don't like that gentleman. It seems a strange thing to say, but he has never looked his proper self since the night of the murder. His man tells me that he has to drench himself with brandy every morning before he can dress himself. Who knows? Perhaps it's the ghosts. They're enough to turn any man's brain."

"I know that I shouldn't like to go after dark anywhere near where the murder was done," said Miss Piper. "It's a good job they have nailed the door up. There's no getting either in or out of the room now."

"And yet they do say," remarked Finch, "that on the eighteenth of every month—you know the murder was done on the eighteenth of May—a little before midnight, footsteps can be heard—the noise of someone walking about in the nailed-up room. You, as the niece of Mr. Pearce, have not been told this, but it has been known to me all along."

"But you don't believe it, Mr. Finch?"

"Well I don't know so much about that," answered Finch, dubiously. "You see it was on account of them footsteps that Sims and Baker left last month. They had been told about the footsteps, and they made up their minds to go and hear them. They did hear them and they gave warning next day. They told Mr. Pearce that the place wasn't lively enough for them. But it was the footsteps tha drove them away."

"After what you have told me I shall be frightened of moving out of my own room after dusk. Listen!" cried Miss Piper, jumping up in alarm. "That's uncle's ring at the side bell. He must have go back before his time."

It was as Finch had stated. Kester St. George was staying as his uncle's guest, at Park Newton. The General's letter found him at Paris, where he had been living of late almost en permanence. It was couched in such a style that he saw clearly if he were to refuse the

invitation thus given, a breach would be created between his uncle and himself which might never be healed in time to come; and, distasteful as the idea of visiting Park Newton was to him, he was not the man to let any sentimental rubbish, as he himself would have been the first to call it, stand in the way of any possible advantage that might accrue to him hereafter. Rich though he was, he still hankered after his uncle's money-bags almost as keenly as in the days when he was so poor; and in his uncle's letter there were one or two sentences which seemed to imply that the probability of their one day becoming his own was by no means so remote as he had at one time deemed it to be.

"And who has so much right to the old boy's savings as I have?" he asked himself. "Certainly not that scowling black-browed Richard Dering. I hope with all my heart that he'll be gone back to India—or to Jericho—or to the bottom of the sea—before I get to Park Newton."

But when he did reach Park Newton he found, greatly to his disgust, that Richard Dering was still there, and that there were no signs whatever of his speedy departure. That there was no love lost between the two men was evident both to themselves and others; but although their coolness towards each other could hardly fail to be noticed by General St. George, he never made the slightest allusion to it, but treated them both as if they were the best of possible friends. Kester he treated with greater cordiality than he had ever accorded to him before.

Richard and Kester saw hardly anything of each other except at the dinner-table, and then the conversation between them was limited to the baldest possible topics. Richard never sat over his wine, and generally asked and obtained his uncle's permission to leave the table the moment dessert was placed upon it. He was an early riser, and had breakfasted and was out riding or walking long before his uncle or cousin made their appearance down stairs.

But these meetings over dinner, brief though they were, were to Kester like a dreadful oft-recurring nightmare which, although it may last for a minute or two only, murders sleep by the dread which it inspires before it comes, and the horror it leaves behind it after it has gone. Richard's voice, his eyes, the swing of his walk, the very pose of his head, were all so many reminders to Kester of a dead and gone man, the faintest recollection of whom he would fain have erased not from his own memory alone, but from that of every one else who had known him. But to hear Richard speak was to hear, as it were, Lionel speaking from the tomb.

General St. George made the delicate state of his health a plea for not seeing much company at Park Newton, nor did he visit much himself. But there was no such restriction on Kester, and he was out nearly every day at one place or another, though he generally contrived

to get back in time to dine with his uncle. He had not forgotten Dr. Bolus's advice, and for the last month or two he had been leading a very quiet life indeed. As a result of this, he fancied that there was a decided improvement in the state of his health. In any case he felt quite sure that the symptoms which had troubled him so much at one time troubled him less frequently now, and were milder at each recurrence. As a consequence, he had shrunk with a sort of morbid dread from seeking any further professional advice. He always felt the worst in a morning—so weak, nervous, and depressed when he woke up from the three or four hours of troubled sleep, which was all that Nature now could be persuaded to give him. Let him tire himself as he might, he never could get much more sleep than when he went to bed comparatively fresh, the consequence simply being that he was more weak and ill than usual next morning. For a little while he tried narcotics. But the remedy proved worse than the disease it was intended to cure. More sleep he got, it is true; but sleep so burdened with frightful dreams that it seemed to him as if it would be better to lie awake for ever, than run the risk of floating helplessly in such a sea of horrors any more.

As Finch had said, he had to dose himself heavily with brandy before he could dress and crawl downstairs to breakfast. But as the day wore on he always got stronger and better, so that by the time it was necessary to dress for dinner, he was quite like his old self again, as well seemingly and as buoyant as the Kester St. George of a dozen years before. It was the dark hours that tried him most, when he was left alone in his great gloomy bedroom, with a candle, and a book, and his own thoughts.

He had brought his valet with him to Park Newton. Not Pierre Janvard this time. Pierre had left Mr. St. George's service a little while previously, and had started business on his own account as an hotel keeper at Bath.

Mr. St. George's new valet was an Englishman named Dobbs. He was a well-trained servant—noiseless, deferential, smooth-spoken, and treating all his master's whims and capricious fluctuations of temper as the merest matter of course: a man who would allow himself to be sworn at, and called an idiot, an ass, the biggest blockhead in existence; and retaliate only with a faint smile of deprecation, and a gentle rubbing of his lean white hands.

Mr. St. George had a strange dislike to being left alone. When he could not have any other society—that is to say, early in the morning, and late at night after everybody else was in bed—he would rather have the company of Dobbs than that of his own thoughts only. In a morning between six and seven—long before daylight in winter—Dobbs was there in his master's room, arranging his clothes, laying out his dressing-case, mixing him his cup of chocolate, supplying him with his brandy,

doing anything—it did not matter what—so long as he was not out of his master's sight for many minutes at a time.

Then at night, late, when the old house was as quiet as a tomb, Mr. St. George would sit in his dressing-room, drinking cold brandy-and-water and smoking cigars till far into the small hours. It was Dobbs's duty at such times to sit with his master in a chair removed a few yards away and a little behind that of Mr. St. George. It was not that Kester wanted him there for conversational purposes, for he rarely condescended to speak to him except to ask him for something that he wanted. The man's silent presence was all that he required, and for such a duty as that Dobbs was invaluable. He never dozed—he would have sat up all night without closing an eye—he never read, he never sneezed or coughed, or made his presence objectionable in any way; and he never spoke unless first spoken to. Silent, watchful, and alert, he was always there and always the same.

Mr. St. George never slept without a light in his room, and Dobbs, who had a little sofa-bed in the dressing-room, and who was a remarkably light sleeper, was instructed to arouse his master at once should he hear the latter begin to toss about or moan in his sleep.

The eighteenth of January had come. Kester was beginning to think that it was about time his visit to Park Newton should be brought to a close. He had two horses in training at Chantilly on which he based some brilliant expectations, and his heart and thoughts were in the stable with his pets. Every day that he prolonged his stay at Park Newton merely served to deepen his hatred of the place. "I shall have a fit of horrors if I stay here much longer," he said to himself. "I'll invent some important business and try to get away the day after to-morrow. I must persuade the old boy to come and spend a month with me at Chantilly when the spring sets fairly in."

Dinner that day was quite an hour later than usual. General St. George had been to see an old friend who was ill, and he did not get back till late. Contrary to his usual practice, Richard Dering sat this evening with his uncle and cousin after the cloth was removed. He sat drinking his wine in an absent mood and scarcely joining in the conversation at all. By-and-by Pearce brought a note to the General on a salver. He put on his spectacles, opened the note, and read it. Then, with a little peevish exclamation, he tossed it into the fire.

"Another of them," he said. "We shall be left before long without a servant to wait on us. I certainly did not anticipate this annoyance when I came to live at Park Newton."

"What is the annoyance of which you speak?" asked Kester.

"Why, that fellow Finch has just given me notice that he intends to leave this day month. That will make the sixth of them, man or maid, that has left me since I came here; and I hear that the rest, old and new, are all likely to follow suit before long."

"You astonish me," said Kester. "You have always seemed to me the most indulgent of masters. If anything, too lenient—excuse me, sir, for saying so—and I can't understand at all why these idiots should want to leave you."

"Oh, it's not me they want to leave: it's the house doesn't suit them."

"The house! And what have they to complain of as regards the house?"

"They swear, every man jack of them, that it's haunted."

Kester's pale face became a shade paler. He fingered his empty wine glass nervously and did not answer for a little while.

"Park Newton haunted! What ridiculous nonsense is this?" he said at last with a forced laugh. "I lived in the house for years when I was a lad; but I certainly never knew before that it had so peculiar a reputation."

"It is only of late—only since the murder last May—that people have got into the way of saying these things."

Again Kester was silent. Richard Dering's keen glance was fixed on his face. He felt it rather than saw it. His under lip quivered slightly. He moved uneasily in his chair.

"What a parcel of blockheads these people must be!" he exclaimed at last. "Do we live in the nineteenth century, or have we gone back to the middle ages? If I were in your place, sir, I would send the whole lot packing, and have an entirely new set from London. It is only these superstitious country-bred louts who believe in such rubbish as ghosts: your thoroughbred Cockney has no faith in anything half so unsubstantial."

"It is certainly very singular," said the General, "that these idle fancies of weak brains should be so contagious. The first man who propagates the idea of a house being haunted has much to answer for. He never finds any lack of ready-made believers; and it is remarkable that we who know better, when we have a subject like this so persistently forced on our notice, come at last, quite unconsciously to ourselves and with no desire whatever to do so, to give a sort of half credence to it. We listen with a more attentive ear to statements so obstinately made, and emanating from so many different sources."

"My dear uncle," cried Kester, "you are surely never going to allow yourself to be converted into a believer in this wretched nonsense!"

"My dear Kester, I am not aware that I have ever been accounted as a superstitious man, and I don't think that I am going to become one so late in the day. I merely say that there is about these matters a certain degree of contagion which it is next to impossible altogether to resist."

Richard, who up to this point had taken no part in the conversation, now spoke. "From what I can make out," he said, "there seems to

be a strange coherence, a remarkable similarity, in the stories told by the different persons who profess to have seen these appearances. And now they are not content with saying that Park Newton is haunted by one ghost: they will have it that two of them have been seen of late."

"Two of them!" exclaimed the General and Kester in one breath.

"Aye, two of them," answered Richard. "One of them I need not name. The other one is said to be the ghost of my poor lost brother."

"What wretched fabrications are these!" exclaimed Kester. "Are you and I, sir," turning to the General, "to have our lives worried and our peace of mind broken by the babbling of a set of idiots, such as there unfortunately seems to be in this house?"

"They do not disturb my peace of mind, Kester."

"They do mine, sir. This house is my property—pardon me for mentioning the fact. Once let it acquire the unenviable reputation of being haunted, and for fifty years to come everybody will swear that it is so. Should you, sir, ever choose to leave the house, what chance shall I have of getting another tenant? None! With the reputation of being haunted, no one will live in it. Slowly but surely it will go to rack and ruin."

"It is hardly to be wondered at," said the General, "that these people have connected a tragedy so terrible, as that which will make Park Newton memorable for a century to come, with certain ghostly appearances. I myself find my thoughts dwelling upon the same thing very frequently indeed. What a strange, sad fate was that of poor young Osmond! Him I did not know. But in my dreams I am continually seeing the face of my poor lost boy whose fate was only one degree less sad. Do you never find yourself haunted in the same way, Kester?"

"Haunted, Uncle Arthur? That is a strange word to make use of. I have not forgotten my cousin, of course—nor am I likely ever to do so."

For a little while they all sat in silence. Nothing was heard save the crackling of the fire or the dropping of a cinder; or, now and then, the moaning of the wintry wind as it crept about the old house, trying the doors and windows, and seeming as though it were burdened with the weight of some terrible secret which it was striving to tell but could not.

Suddenly Richard Dering spoke. "This is the eighteenth of January," he said. "Eight months ago to-night, Percy Osmond was murdered, and under this very roof. To-night, at twelve o'clock, if what these people allege be true, footsteps will be heard—the noise of some one walking up and down the room where the murder was committed. Such being the case, what more easy than for us three to prove or disprove the accuracy of at least this part of the story? Why

not go, all three of us, a few minutes before twelve; and, accompanied by two or three of the servants who shall be chosen by the rest as a deputation, station ourselves close to the door of the nailed-up room, and there await the result? I do not for one moment anticipate that we shall either see or hear anything out of the ordinary way. Once let us prove this to the satisfaction of the servants, and I don't think that we shall be troubled with much more nonsense about ghostly footsteps or appearances at Park Newton."

"Not a bad idea, Dick, by any means," said the General. "What say you, Kester?"

Kester had pushed back his chair from the table while Richard was speaking. There was a strange look on his face: in his eyes terror, on his lips a derisive smile. He emptied his glass before answering.

"Faith, sir," he said, "it seems to me that you attach far too much importance to the cackling of these idiots. I would treat their assertions with the contempt they deserve, and send the whole crew about their business before they were two days older. Your presence there, as it seems to me, would be like a confession of your belief in the possible truth of certain statements: which are really so childish that no sensible person can treat them otherwise than with the most supreme contempt."

"I hardly agree with you there, Kester," said General St. George. "Our presence would be like a guarantee of good faith, and would set the question at rest at once and for ever. At all events, the plan is one which I mean to try, and I should like both of you to be there with me. Richard, you can arrange for certain of the servants to be ready a few minutes before midnight."

"Really, sir, I should feel obliged if you would excuse me from accompanying you," said Kester. "I have a bad headache to-night, and intend to get between the sheets as soon as possible."

"Pooh—pooh—pooh!" said the General, hastily. "I shall not excuse you. Hang your headaches! When I was a young fellow we left headaches to the women, and did not know what such things were ourselves. I have set my mind on having a game of backgammon with you this evening, and I shall not let you go."

His uncle's tone was so peremptory that Kester dared not say another word. He sat down again in silence.

At five minutes before twelve, they all met in the library—General St. George, Richard, Kester, and a deputation from the servants' hall, headed by Finch with a pair of lighted candles. Finch led the way through the cold and dismal passages, up the black oaken staircase, through the dreary picture gallery, where the portrait of each dead and gone St. George looked down inquiringly and seemed to ask the meaning of so strange a procession; and so at last they reached the

door of the nailed-up room. Finch deposited his candles on the nearest window-sill, and by their dim, uncertain light, the company grouped themselves round the door, the servants a little way behind their superiors, and waited. No one spoke: no one wanted to speak. They were thinking of the dark tragedy that, but a few short months before, and in the dead of night, had been enacted behind that shut-up door. Presently the turret-clock began to strike. Slowly and lingeringly it tolled, as if unwilling to let the dying day drop into its grave. Over all there, a deeper hush fell. Twelve solemn strokes, and then silence and another day.

Silence for, perhaps, the space of half a minute; when, with an indescribable awe, they heard, one and all, a slight noise, as of a chair being pushed back; and the next moment came the sound, clear, distinct, and unmistakable, of footsteps slowly pacing the bare, polished floor of the nailed-up room. The servants all shrank back a little, and turned their white and frightened faces on one another. Kester St. George, too, staggered back a step or two and leaned for support against an angle of the wall.

Even at that supreme moment he could feel that the cold, stern eyes of Richard Dering were fixed on his face, and he hated him with a hatred like death.

Hardly breathing, they all listened, while the footsteps slowly, unhesitatingly, paced the room. Suddenly they heard another sound which several there present at once recognised. What they heard was the noise of a man coughing; and the cough they heard was the short, dry, grating cough that had been peculiar to Mr. Percy Osmond, and to him alone. Finch recognised it in a moment. So did Kester St. George: who, with a quick cry of pain, pressed his hand to his heart, and staggering back a pace or two, fell to the ground in a dead faint.

(*To be continued.*)

MADAME COTTIN.

MANY of those writers who, by their mimic world of fiction, have thrilled men and women with horror or pity, have led lives differing as much from the lives of their ideal personages as the course of a sluggish stream creeping through flat green fields in a midland county differs from the course of a Highland brook which dashes over precipices, and darts through deep ravines, and tosses up in the sunlight clouds of diamond spray. Mrs. Ratcliffe, who, seventy years ago, peopled the dreams of the fashionable world with shadowy forms gliding along gloomy corridors, and assassins stealing at dead of night through postern doors, was in daily life the brightest and cheeriest of women. She wrote her terrible romances at an English fireside, with her husband, a merry, commonplace man, with whom she spent many merry commonplace years, sitting opposite her, and never, from the beginning to the end of her days, beheld an Italian Palazzo or an Alpine peak. Samuel Richardson, who drew such showers of tears from bright eyes over the protracted sorrows of his "Clarissa," was a stout, jolly little man, who loved nothing so much as tea and toast in a back parlour. The distinguished Frenchwoman, however, whose name stands at the head of these pages, was in this respect a striking contrast to many of her brothers and sisters in art. Her life was as full of romantic incident as that of the heroines of her novels, and for this reason, as well as for her high position in French literature, we take interest in telling her story.

About the year 1785, one of the richest and best known merchants of Bordeaux was M. Resteaud. He was a man of much wealth, but more ostentation; a man of cool, shrewd brain, but a fiery Southern temperament, a man who loved well his elegant ease in his splendidly furnished salon, but who loved still better the feverish joys of monied speculation. His wife was a pretty blonde, made up in about equal parts of imagination, sentiment, and heart.

The pair loved each other with a love not too common in those days between married couples in France, and the tie was rendered closer and dearer by their only child, a daughter called Sophia. At the time when our story begins Sophia Resteaud was a rapidly developing girl of thirteen, with a face which, without being absolutely handsome, was charming from its mobile, April-like changefulness of expression; with an inborn sense of grace and beauty which revealed itself in every fold of her dress, in every chord she drew from the strings of her harp, in every inflection of her voice when she read or recited; with a fancy already ripe for flirtation; with a half-written novel already lurking among the Italian exercises at the bottom of her desk.

At this period there came to M. Resteaud's house a certain Parisian banker, named Auguste Cottin. M. Resteaud had borrowed from him for some of his speculations a large sum of money, and thinking perhaps that payment came somewhat slowly, the banker now appeared to demand its return. Auguste Cottin was a handsome man of thirty. He had a pretty amateur taste in art and literature, a faculty for falling in love with half a dozen women at once, a vast fortune, a thousand and one whims and caprices, but at the bottom of all a kindly heart.

There were two things which struck Cottin in M. Resteaud's house. One was the embarrassed manner of the merchant as he asked him to come again to-morrow for his money; the other was the naive grace of Sophia, as unknown to herself, he watched and listened to her through the trees in the garden, while she repeated to her mother a scene from Racine. After a little time Cottin revealed himself, together with Sophia's father, who had been a party to the little deception. Auguste Cottin exchanged a few friendly words chiefly expressive of his admiration for Sophia with the mother and daughter, and then left them with a feeling of deep interest.

That evening as the banker sat in his hotel, thinking, perhaps, of bright louis d'or; perhaps, who knows, of brighter hair; the door suddenly opened and a slight, veiled female figure glided into the room. An instant after the mysterious visitor was at Auguste Cottin's feet. He started up in surprise, for now the hood was thrown back and revealed the face of Sophia Resteaud. There she knelt with the crimson glow of girlish shyness tinging her cheeks, with a whole world of conflicting feelings in her eyes, with her hands stretched towards him in silent entreaty. Wonderingly, tenderly he raised her, and made her sit beside him. Then in broken words she told for what she had come. She and her mother had learned by secret but sure means that M. Resteaud was a bankrupt, and was about to destroy himself. There seemed to the agonized wife and daughter but one hope, and that was that the banker should forgive him his debt, or, at least, postpone payment to some distant day. Auguste Cottin's mind was quickly made up. That pleading young face and the generous impulses of his heart at once prevailed. The debt was forgiven entirely and for ever. M. Resteaud's life and credit were saved. The banker received the sweet homage of the pretty mother and charming little daughter and then went back to Paris, on the whole well pleased with what he had done; for though his generosity had for a time somewhat straitened his means, he had still a large capital which skilful management would soon again double.

Two years now passed away—two years, during which Sophia's form grew taller and less childlike, and the torch of intellect kindled more brightly in her eyes, and new treasures were revealed in her mind and heart. Her reading was, for a girl of her age, wonderfully deep

and universal. Fancy indulged in many a dream as she half slumbered in the shade of the garden, and we need not ask who was the hero of her dreams. Little stories and poems fell from her pen as lightly and easily as petals from a full-blown rose; but these were for no eyes save those of her mother and her governess. Her father had a fixed idea that a woman's place is at the embroidery frame, in the kitchen, in the salon fascinating men, but not in print before the public; and he therefore carefully checked and discouraged Sophia's literary aspirations. It was probably this early influence of her father which made the authoress of "Mathilde" so reluctant in letting her genius shine forth to the world. Her mother, like the good wife that she was, followed in a great measure her husband's lead, but still she could not help smiling and looking pleased as she watched the girl's face at her writing-table.

But what was Auguste Cottin about all this while? He was building up a yet more princely fortune than before. He was giving petits soupers which were as fabulous banquets to the crowd of unlucky outsiders who never passed behind the veil into the Holy of Holies of the rich banker's favour. He was exchanging love tokens with half the ladies in Paris. This latter dangerous game he carried on till at last, without exactly knowing how, he found that he had drifted into an engagement of marriage with Blanche de Florigny, who had as many noble ancestors as the banker had millions; whose laugh was the boldest at carnival or masked ball; who trod on talons rouges at religious ceremonies and in court processions with more dignified grace than any woman in France. Yet even amid the golden tumult of the money-market, even when the summer lightning of wit played brightest round the supper table—yes, even when he sat beside his splendid betrothed, there would often rise up before him the picture of a sweet imploring face, a soft voice pleading for a father's life would echo in his ear.

Engaged though he was to be married, M. Cottin seemed in no haste to bring nearer the happy day. Madlle. de Florigny vaguely suspected that all was not right, but was too proud to press him on the point. At length, one day he declared to her that he had formed an intention to make a tour in foreign lands before he settled down as a married man. The young lady at first expostulated a little, but quickly retired into the haughtiness of the grande dame, and let him go his own way. For a time, therefore, Paris saw no more of the rich banker, and London and Brussels were treated to a view of his fine horses and splendid liveries.

Before he went, however, influenced by some mysterious power which was certainly not the power of his fair Blanche's eyes, he wrote to M. and Madame Resteaud, with whom he had always kept up a friendly correspondence, and asked them if they would like, during his

absence, to inhabit his house in Paris. Glad enough to get a holiday in the capital so cheaply, the merchant's family at once acted on his proposal, and were soon installed in the stately Hôtel Cottin.

That first visit to Paris must have been a wonderful waking-up for Sophia. What fresh combinations of character she must have found in the new class of men and women around her; what richness of colouring in the crowded streets. What strains of music, hitherto only heard in dreams, must have thrilled her soul at opera or concert; for though Bordeaux was a large provincial town, it was in many points, especially those of art, far behind the capital.

After he had been away for some months Auguste Cottin began to find an inexplicable and strong longing growing up within him to know how his friends from the provinces were getting on in his Parisian house. This desire at length became so irresistible that, without ever having written to tell the Resteauds his intention, he one evening came back to Paris, followed only by a single servant. Passing through the town as quietly as possible, as he drew near his house, he saw from the number of carriages, and the bustle of servants around the door, that M. and Madame Resteaud must be receiving a large party that night. Thinking that it might embarrass his friends if he announced himself to them at such a moment, he turned aside to a small door which led into a suite of rooms he used formerly to occupy. On he wandered, from one dimly lit apartment to another, among glimmering busts and china and the heavy perfumes of flowers. Here all was still, for the grand reception rooms were at the other end of the house. There only now and then reached his ear a strain of distant music, or the far-off roll of a carriage.

At length he came to the door of his own little private library. From beneath it there streamed out a bright light. He paused for a moment, but thinking all the Resteaud family must surely be engaged with their guests, soon entered. On the threshold he stood still with a low cry of surprise. There, in the full light of a crystal lamp which hung from the ceiling lay Sophia asleep on a sofa. The scattered sunbeams of her hair lying on the pillow framed with shimmering gold her face, where childhood still smiled in the softly rounded cheek, but womanhood sat already enthroned on the brow, thoughtful even in slumber. Her little hand held loosely a book which lay on her lap, In every fold of her dress, in every flexible limb, there was the careless grace of perfect rest. A headache had kept her that evening from helping her parents to receive their guests. But instead of going to bed she had sat up reading, and sleep had stolen upon the tired girl before she was well aware of it. From that sleep she was aroused by Auguste Cottin's lips upon her hand.

Who can doubt the result of that night's sudden meeting? A few weeks after, Cottin had a long interview with Madlle. de Florigny, which

ended in their engagement being broken off. The young lady let him go with a toss and a smile. But the poor girl must have shed many a tear in secret, for her passion for Auguste Cottin tinged, as we shall see, the whole of her short, sad life.

Soon after that the engagement between M. Cottin and Madlle. Resteaud was made public. It was a love match in the true sense of the good old phrase. In Sophia's heart there had already grown up for Auguste a love which was to bloom on in spite of rough winds and nipping frosts until that heart had ceased to beat. As for Blanche de Florigny's faithless suitor, he certainly at this time believed that no other being upon earth, except his sweet child bride, could make the sunshine of his life.

Soon after their daughter's betrothal M. and Madame Resteaud took her back to Bordeaux, where the wedding was to take place. The pair were married very quietly late one evening in a room at the bride's home, following the custom usual at that time in the South of France among the higher classes. The ceremony was hardly over, and the parents had scarcely had time to bless their daughter, when suddenly there rang through the house the cry of "Fire, fire." Out rushed the startled father and bridegroom, to see the frightened servants hurrying about in wild confusion, and to meet a stifling cloud of smoke, which told that the alarm was but too true, rolling up the passage. Half dead with terror, Sophia was carried by her husband from the scene of danger, and as they passed down the street to a neighbour's house, where he placed her in safety, the blazing home of her childhood was their nuptial torch. How the fire broke out was never exactly known. Some said it was an accident, some that it was an act of revenge on the part of a cousin of Madlle. Resteaud's, who had hoped for her hand. Be that as it might, it was a sinister omen for a wedding-day. M. Resteaud lost much by the fire and was again indebted to his son-in-law for pecuniary help.

Soon after her marriage the young girl began to find that being exalted from a Madlle. into a Madame was not exactly being raised from a terrestrial into a celestial Paradise.

It was M. Cottin's ambition to gather together at his house all that was most distinguished among the rank and talent of Paris, and to that end he worked most industriously. Rich and handsome though he was, it was certainly a difficult undertaking for a banker in those exclusive days in France, and no doubt he looked to his wife to be a help-meet for him in these efforts. He wished her to be the very star of his splendid parties; to go about among his guests radiant in silks and jewels, dropping here a smile and there a gracious word, dazzling by turns with her wit and with her beauty.

To shine, however, in large assemblies was exactly what Sophia Cottin could not do. Her figure and face, though attractive, were pre-

cisely the kind of figure and face which don't pay for dressing. However much her lady's-maid laboured to turn her into a tulip, she was sure, after all, to be still a wood-violet. She always seemed one of the simplest and least important people at her own parties, and her natural shyness made matters worse. She was silent and constrained among a crowd of mere acquaintances, and now and then even sinned so far against the canons of politeness as to slip away to solitude and her beloved books before the evening was half over, and leave her guests to entertain each other.

Once to please her husband she so far overcame her natural disposition as to read aloud to a large party, after the manner of Madame de Staël, a few chapters of a half-finished novel. But the performance, principally no doubt from the timidity of the authoress, does not seem to have been a success. The assembled gentlemen and ladies applauded as in duty bound, but the experiment was not again tried.

All this put M. Cottin out of conceit with his young wife. She was pretty and clever it was true, but then what was the use of her being either if she did not let the world know it? She was as bad as the bird of old renown who could sing and would not. After awhile he began to look about for other women who were pretty and clever as well as Sophia, and who had not the least objection to himself and all Paris knowing it. There were many such, and Blanche de Florigny was one of them. She had never ceased to love Auguste Cottin. Her principles in the hour of temptation proved to be as low as her birth was high, and before long she drew M. Cottin into a close liaison.

Sophia's attitude at this time was most womanly and dignified. She still loved her husband in spite of his shortcomings towards her, and treated him with the same gentle equable affection as ever. She strove to forget herself in study and the bright work of her pen. She had by this time in her desk a completed and carefully-polished novel, but still influenced by the feeling against female authorship breathed into her by her father, she did not think of publication.

Troubles now came fast and thick on Madame Cottin. First she watched by the death beds of both her parents, who passed away quickly soon after each other. Then her husband fell into bad health, and, after a lingering illness, died, owning his sins against her and tenderly nursed by her to the last. She mourned him bitterly, yet still bore the blow with brave resignation. Before she was twenty she was thus left a widow.

Next the storm of the French Revolution swept past her and carried away with it the greater part of her fortune. The woman who had once been the mistress of the most splendid salon in Paris now sat in a small, scantily-furnished room which looked into a back street, and gained her living, together with an old servant, her only companion, by embroidery, in which she was very skilled.

Among the first victims of the guillotine was Madlle. de Florigny. The night before her execution Madame Cottin stood in her cell. She came on a noble Christian mission, to assure her rival of her forgiveness, and to help the erring woman (in those days, when priestly comfort was denied to the condemned) to reconcile herself with God. There was a short, touching scene between the two women. Blanche de Florigny was penitent and resigned, and died next day on the scaffold bravely, like the true daughter of the race of warriors from which she sprang.

One day, when the fury of the revolution was at its height, Madame Cottin and her servant were sitting at work, when suddenly a man rushed into the room and fell fainting into a chair. He was a venerable looking old man, whose appearance at once excited Madame Cottin's pity and interest. Though startled, she and her servant busied themselves with careful womanly skill about the stranger, and soon he revived. When he began to recover, the word gentleman, in the full meaning of that word then in France, was apparent in his every tone and movement, in his graceful yet somewhat formal language, in his gallant respectful manner towards the lady, in the stately carriage of his well-shaped old head. Madame Cottin now became convinced that he was a proscribed person seeking shelter, but forbore asking him any question till he had satisfied the hunger which, though he was too much of a gentleman to say so, was evidently the chief cause of his weakness. When he grew a little stronger, he told her that he was a Marquis, and an old friend of her father, and that the bloodhounds of the Republic were on his track. Scarcely had the words passed his lips when there was a loud knock at the door, and the terrible words, "Open in the name of the Republic," rang through the room.

They gazed at each other in voiceless horror. There seemed no escape; yet still Sophia Cottin quickly resolved that her father's friend should not perish without an effort to save him. She hastily ensconced the old man behind the large heavy window curtain, seated herself with the back of her chair close against it with a book in her hand, signed to the servant to keep calm, and then, gathering together all the quiet courage of which she had a considerable store beneath her shyness of manner, bade the men enter, in a steady voice.

"Is there not a man here?" asked the leader of the band.

"A man," cried Madame Cottin, looking up with the most innocent surprise from her book.

"A man," repeated the old servant, trying to be very busy at the stove.

The quiet carelessness of the two women at once somewhat blunted suspicion, but the officers of the Republic knew well enough that they could not always, when they visited a house, trust to outward appearances, and so they searched the little sitting-room and the neighbouring

bedroom from end to end. All the while Madame Cottin never moved or raised her eyes from her book. Those were fearful minutes. She could hear the low breathing of the poor old man behind her. She felt that her slight figure was the only barrier between him and destruction. She knew that a game of hazard was being played, in which the stake was a human life. The men had now come back to the door by which they had entered, without disturbing Madame Cottin's seat. Probably such cool audacity as hers had never come into the minds of even such practical detectives as they were.

"Bon soir, citoyenne," said the chief bloodhound with surly civility, and then they all left the room.

The Marquis was safe for the present, but what now was to be done with him. His object was, if possible, to escape to America, where he had many relations and friends, but he had not a sou in his pocket, and how was he to take that long journey without money? Madame Cottin shook out her purse. There were only a few francs in it. She looked into her jewel-case. There was not so much as a garnet left. She glanced towards the little side-board. There was nothing but German silver upon it. Suddenly the remembrance of the MS. in her desk flashed through her mind. Yes, that might be a saleable article, at least she would try if it was. Surely even the spirit of her father would bless this effort to help a friendless old man.

It was a dark evening of drizzling rain when Madame Cottin, followed only by her old servant, went out, MS. in hand. The lamps in the streets flickered fitfully. Wild gusts of wind came moaning down the side alleys. As they crossed one fatal square, they could see the outline of the guillotine against the ashy grey background of the sky. It was not a cheering walk for the poor young authoress.

She turned into one publisher, who gave her a half-contemptuous, half-pitying smile, as a young lady not quite right in her head. She turned into a second one, who, being out of humour, dismissed her as he might have done a peasant woman with stale eggs. She turned into a third, who groaned over the times, and lamented that he could not keep himself afloat, let alone an unknown author.

"Let us go home, Madame," said the old servant wearily; but Madame would not go home. They went now into a small publisher's, in a less frequented part of the town. Here the business was managed by a woman in a widow's dress, like Sophia's own. The livery of sorrow drew the two towards each other. The woman soon became certain that Madame Cottin wanted to earn money for some good purpose, and this thought, together with the young authoress's sweet, anxious face, interested her. She bade her leave her MS., saying that her brother-in-law should read it, and that if he liked it, she would send her some money for it next morning. Madame Cottin departed comforted, but still trembling. That was a night of long suspense for poor

Sophia. The old man's life depended on her MS., and besides, she had her fears and palpitations as an authoress. Next morning, however, there came a complimentary letter from the publisher, containing a few hundred francs, and promising more if the book succeeded. With that money the Marquis managed to escape in safety, and lived to bless Sophia Cottin on the American shores.

Some months after, when order was restored in France, Madame Cottin's first novel, "Claire D'Albe," came out, and soon made its way into public favour, bringing its writer both fame and money. Her other novels then soon followed in quick succession. They were all popular in their day; but the only two that have lived are "Mathilde," which, from its grace of style and its skilfully worked-up interest, will always be a favourite with cultivated readers; and "Elizabeth; or the Exiles of Siberia," which, from the simple pathos of its story, has become in translations a household volume in most European homes.

The money made by her writings, and the restoration of part of her fortune, enabled Madame Cottin to live again in a good house in the best part of Paris. She saw much society in her own quiet way, and kept a sort of little literary court. She never married again. Her heart still clung to the memory of the husband of her youth. She had, however, a train of lovers with whom she carried on a good deal of sentimental flirting. Two of her adorers even went so far as to blow their brains out for her sake. The fashionable authoress was a very different person from the banker's little wife of old days.

Madame Cottin was never mixed up with the stormy politics of the day, nor was she the least tainted with the religious scepticism then so widely spread through France. She was always an earnest Roman Catholic. She did not long live to enjoy her literary fame. Her early troubles and her mental work had weakened her constitution, and at thirty she died, leaving a name precious to the women of France.

ALICE KING.

HESTER REED'S PILLS.

"HOW are the babies, Hester?"

Mrs. Todhetley was passing the gate of George Reed's cottage, and stopped to put the question. Hester Reed, sunning her cap and clean cotton gown in the garden, the three elder children around, watering the beds with a doll's watering-pot, and a baby hiding its face on her shoulder, dropped a curtsey as she answered.

"They be but poorly, ma'am, thank you. Look up, Susy," turning the baby's face upwards to show it: and a pale mite of a face it was, with sleepy eyes. "For a day or two past they've not seemed the thing; and they be both cross."

"I should think their teeth are troubling them, Hester."

"Maybe, ma'am. I shouldn't wonder. Hetty, she seems worse than Susy. She's a-lying there in the basket indoors. Would you please spare a minute to step in and look at her, ma'am."

Mrs. Todhetley opened the gate. "I may as well go in and see, Johnny," she said to me in an undertone. "I fear they are both rather sickly."

Easter was that year very nearly as late as it can be. This brought the time, you know, towards the end of April: and, to judge by the weather, it might have been the end of May, the days were so warm and glorious.

Tod and I were at home for the short holidays, at Dyke Manor. This was Easter Tuesday. The Squire and Tod had gone riding over to old Jacobson's. I, having nothing else to do, got the Mater to come with me for a practice on the church organ; and we were taking the round home again through the village.

The other baby, "Hetty," lay in the kitchen in a clothes basket. It had just the same sort of puny white face as its sister. These two were twins, and about a year old. When they were born, Church Dykely went on finely at Hester Reed, asking her if she would not have had enough with one new child but she must go and set up two.

"It does seem very poorly," remarked Mrs. Todhetley, stooping over the young mortal (which was not cross just now, but very still and quiet), and letting it clasp its little fist round one of her fingers. "No doubt it is the teeth. If the children do not get better soon, I think, were I you, Hester, I should speak to Mr. Duffham."

The advice seemed to strike Hester Reed all of a heap. "Speak to him! To Dr. Duffham!" she exclaimed. "Why, ma'am, they must both be a good deal worse than they be, afore we does that. I'll give 'em a dose o' mild physic apiece; I daresay that'll bring 'em round."

"I should think it would not hurt them," assented Mrs. Todhetley. "They both seem feverish; this one especially. I hear you have had Cathy over," she went on, passing to another subject.

"Sure enough us have," said Mrs. Reed. "She come over yesterday was a week and stayed till Friday night."

"And what is she doing now?"

"Well, ma'am, Cathy's keeping herself; and that's something. She has got a place at Tewkesbury to serve in some shop; is quite in clover there by all accounts. Two good gownds she brought over to her back; and she's pretty nigh as light-hearted as she was afore she went off to enter on her first troubles."

"Hannah told me she was not looking well."

"She have had a nasty attack of—what was it?—neuralgy, I think she called it, and been obliged to go to a doctor," answered Hester Reed. "That's why they gave her the holiday. She was very well while she was here."

I had stood at the door, talking to the little ones and their watering-pot. As the Mater was taking her last final word with Mrs. Reed, I went on to hold open the gate for her, when some woman whisked round the corner from Piefinch Lane, and in at the gate.

"Thank ye, sir," said she to me: as if I had been holding it open for her especial benefit.

It was Ann Dovey, the blacksmith's wife down Piefinch Cut: a smart young woman fond of fine gowns and caps. Mrs. Todhetley came away and Ann Dovey went in. And this is what passed at Reed's—as leaked out to the world afterwards.

The baby in the basket began to cry, and Ann Dovey lifted it out and took it on her lap. She understood all about children, having been the eldest of a numerous flock at home, and was no doubt all the fonder of them because she had none of her own. Mrs. Dovey was moreover a great gossip, liking to have as many fingers in her neighbours' pies as she could conveniently get in.

"And now what's amiss with these here two twins?" asked she in a confidential tone, bending her face forward till it nearly touched Mrs. Reed's, who had sat down opposite to her with the other baby. "Sarah Tanken, passing our shop just now, telled me they warn't the thing at all, so I thought I'd run round."

"Sarah Tanken looked in while I was a-washing up after dinner, and saw 'em both," assented Mrs. Reed. "Hetty's the worst of the two; more peeky like."

"Which *is* Hetty?" demanded Ann Dovey; who, with all her neighbourly visits, had not learnt to distinguish the two apart.

"That one that you be a nursing."

"Did the mistress of the Manor look at 'em?—I see her a coming out of here."

"She come in for that. She thinks I'd better give 'em both some mild physic. Leastways, I said a dose might bring 'em round," added Hester Reed, correcting herself, "and she said, Yes, it might."

"It's the very thing for 'em, Hester Reed," pronounced Mrs. Dovey, decisively. "There's nothing like a dose of physic for little ones: it often stops a bout of illness. You give it to them; and don't lose no time. Grey powder's best."

"I've not got any grey powder by me," said Mrs. Reed. "It crossed my mind to try 'em with one o' them pills I had from Abel Crew."

"What pills be they?"

"Some I had from him for myself the beginning o' the year, when I was getting the headache so much. They be as mild as mild can be; but they did me good. The box is upstairs."

"How do you know they'd be the right pills to give to babies?" sensibly questioned Mrs. Dovey.

"Oh, they be right enough for that. When little Georgy was poorly two or three weeks back, I ran out to Abel Crew, chancing to see him go by the gate, and asked whether one of his pills would do the child harm. He said No, it would do him good."

"And did it get him round?"

"I never gave it. Georgy seemed to be so much pearter afore night came, that I thought I'd wait till the morrow. He's a rare bad one to take physic, he is. You may cover a powder in treacle that thick, Ann Dovey, but the boy scents it out somehow, and can't be got to touch it. His father always has to make him; I can't. He got well that time without the pill."

"Well, I should try the pills on the two little twins," advised Ann Dovey. "I'm sure they want something o' the sort. Look at this one! lying like a lamb in my arms, staring up at me with its poor eyes and never moving. You may always know when a child's ill by its quietness. Nothing ailing 'em, they worry the life out of you."

"Both of them were cross enough this morning," remarked Hester Reed, "and for that reason I know they be worse. I'll try the pill to-night."

Now, whether it was that Ann Dovey had any especial love for presiding at the ceremony of administering pills to children, or whether she only looked in again incidentally in passing, certain it was, that in the evening she was for the second time at George Reed's cottage. Mrs. Reed had put the three elder ones to bed; or, as she expressed it, got 'em out o' the way; and was undressing the twins by firelight, when Ann Dovey tripped into the kitchen. George Reed was at work in the front garden, digging; though it was getting almost too dark to see where he inserted the spade.

"Have ye give 'em their physic yet?" was Mrs. Dovey's salutation.

"No, but I'm a-going to," answered Hester Reed. "You be just

come in time to hold 'em for me, Ann Dovey, while I go upstairs for the box."

Ann Dovey received the pair of babies, and sat down in Mrs. Reed's chair. Taking the candle, Mrs. Reed ran upstairs to the room where the elder children slept. The house was better furnished than cottages generally are, and the rooms were of a fairly good size. Opposite the bed stood a high deal press with a flat top, which Mrs. Reed made a shelf of, for keeping things that must be out of the children's reach. Stepping on a chair, she put her hand out for the box of pills, which stood in its usual place near the corner; and went downstairs with it.

It was an ordinary paste-board pill-box, containing a few pills—six or seven, perhaps. Mrs. Dovey, curious in all matters, lifted the lid and smelt at the pills. Hester Reed was getting the moist sugar they were to be administered in.

"What did you have these here pills for?" questioned Ann Dovey, as Mrs. Reed came back with the sugar. "They bain't over big."

"For headache, chiefly, and pain in the side. I asked old Abel Crew if he could give me something for it, and he gave me these pills."

Mrs. Reed was moistening a teaspoonful of the sugar as she spoke Taking out one of the pills she proceeded to press it into little bits, and then mixed it with the sugar. It formed a kind of paste. Dose the first.

"That ain't moist enough, Hester Reed," pronounced Mrs. Dovey, critically.

"No? I'll put a drop more warm water."

The water was added, and one of the children was fed with the delectable compound—Hetty. Mrs. Dovey spoke again.

"Is it all for her? Won't a whole pill be too much for one, d'ye think?"

"Not a bit. When I asked old Abel whether one pill would be too much for Georgy, he said No—two wouldn't hurt him. I tell ye, Ann Dovey, they be as mild as milk."

Hetty sucked in the whole dose by degrees. Susy had a similar one made ready, and swallowed it in her turn. Then the two babies were conveyed upstairs and put to bed side by side in their mother's room.

Mrs. Dovey, the ceremony being over, took her departure. George Reed came in to his early supper, and soon afterwards he and his wife went up to bed. Men who have to be up at five in the morning, must go to rest betimes. The fire and candle were put out, the doors locked, and the cottage was steeped in quietness at a time when in larger houses the evening was not much more than beginning.

How long she slept, Mrs. Reed could not tell. Whether it might be the first part of the night, early or late, or whether morning might

be close upon the dawn, she knew not; but she was startled out of her sleep by the cries of the babies. Awful cries, they seemed, coming from children so young; and there could be no mistake that each of them was in terrible agony.

"Why, it's convulsions!" exclaimed George Reed. "Both of them, too!"

Going downstairs as he was, he hastily lighted the kitchen fire and put a kettle of water on. Then, dressing himself, he ran out for Mr. Duffham. A little delay, and the doctor came; ten minutes, or so, after George Reed had got back again.

Duffham was accustomed to scenes, and he entered on one now. Mrs. Reed, in a state of distress, had put the babies in blankets and brought them down to the kitchen fire: the three elder children, aroused out of bed by the cries, were standing about in their night clothes, crying with fright. One of the babies was dead—Hetty. She had just expired in her father's arms. The other was dying.

"What on earth have you been giving to these children?" exclaimed Duffham, after taking a good look at the two.

"Oh, sir, what is it, please?" sobbed Mrs. Reed in her terror. "Convulsions?"

"Convulsions—no," said the doctor, in a fume. "It is something else: as I believe—Poison." At which she set up a shriek that might have been heard out of doors.

Well, Hetty was dead, I say: and Duffham could not do anything to save the other. It died while he stood there. Duffham repeated his conjecture of poison: and Mrs. Reed, all topsy-turvy though she was, three parts bereft of her senses, resented the implication almost angrily.

"Poison!" cried she. "How can you think of such a thing, sir?"

"I tell you that to the best of my belief these children have both died from some irritant poison," asserted Duffham, coolly imperative. "I ask what you have been giving them."

"They have not been well this three or four days past," replied she, wandering from the point; not in evasion, but in her mind's bewilderment. "It must have been their teeth, sir; I thought they were cutting 'em with fever."

"Did you give them any physic?"

"Yes, sir. A pill a-piece last night when I put 'em to bed."

"Ah!" said Mr. Duffham. "What pill was it?"

"One of Abel Crew's."

This answer surprised him. Allowing that his suspicion of poison was correct, he assumed that these pills must have contained it: and he had never had cause to suppose that Abel Crew's pills were otherwise than innocent.

Mrs. Reed, her voice broken by sobs, explained further in answer

to his questions, telling him how she had procured these pills from Abel Crew some time before, and had given one of the said pills to each of the babies. Duffham stood against the dresser taking it all in with a solemn face, his cane held up to his chin.

"Let me see this box of pills, Mrs. Reed."

She went upstairs to get it. A tidy woman in her ways, she had put the box in its place again atop of the press. Duffham took off the lid and examined the pills.

"Do you happen to have a bit of sealing-wax in the house, George Reed?" he asked presently.

George Reed, who had stood like a man dazed, looking first on one then on the other of his dead little ones, answered that he had not. But the eldest child, Annie, spoke up, saying that there was a piece in her little work-box: Cathy had given it her last week when she was at home.

It was produced: part of a small stick of fancy wax, green and gold. Duffham wrapped the pill-box up in the back of a letter that he took from his pocket, and sealed it with a seal that hung to his watch-chain. He put the parcel into the hand of George Reed.

"Take care of it," he said. "This will be wanted."

"There could not have be poison in them pills, sir," burst out Mrs. Reed, her distress increasing at the possibility that he might be right. "If there had been they'd ha' poisoned me. One night I took three of 'em."

Duffham did not answer. He was nodding his head to his own thoughts.

"And who ever heard of Abel Crew mixing up poison in his pills?" went on Mrs. Reed. "If you please, sir, I don't think he could do it."

"Well, that part of it puzzles me—how he came to do it," acknowledged Duffham. "I like old Abel, and shall be sorry if it is proved that his pills have done the mischief."

Mrs. Reed shook her head. She had better faith than that in Abel Crew.

Ever so many years before, for it was in the time of Sir Peter Chavasse, there appeared one day a wanderer at Church Dykely. It was hot weather, and he seemed to think nothing of encamping out in the fields by night, under the summer stars. Who he was, or what he was, or why he had come, or why he stayed, nobody knew. He was evidently not a tramp, or a gipsy, or a travelling tinker; quite superior to it all: a slender, young, and silent man, with a pale and gentle face.

At one corner of the common, spreading itself between the village and Chavasse Grange, there stood a covered wooden shed, formerly

used to impound stray cattle; but left to itself since the square space for the new pound had been railed round. By-and-by it was found that the wanderer had taken to this shed to sleep in. Next his name leaked out: "Abel Crew."

He lived how he could, and as simply as a hermit. Buying a penny loaf at the baker's, and making his dinner of it with a handful of sorrel plucked from the fields, and a drink from the rivulet that ran through the wilderness outside the Chavasse grounds. His days were spent in examining roots and wild herbs, now and then in digging one up; and his nights mostly in studying the stars. Old Sir Peter struck up a kind of speaking acquaintanceship with him; and, it was said, was surprised by his stock of knowledge and at the extent of his travels, for he knew personally many foreign places where even Sir Peter himself had never been. That may have caused Sir Peter—who was lord of the manor and of the common included—to tolerate in him what it was supposed he would not in others. Any way, when Abel Crew began to dig the ground about his shed, and plant roots and herbs in it, Sir Peter let him do it and never interfered. It was quite the opposite; for Sir Peter would sometimes stand to watch him at his work, talking all the while.

In the course of time there was quite an extensive garden round the shed. Speaking comparatively, you know: for we do not expect to see a shed garden as large as that of a mansion. It was fenced in with a hedge and wooden palings, all the work of Abel Crew's hands. Sir Peter was dead then; but Lady Chavasse, guardian of the young heir, Sir Geoffry, extended to him the same favour that her husband had; and, if she did not absolutely give sanction to what he was doing, she at any rate did not oppose. Abel Crew filled his garden with rare and choice and useful field herbs, the valuable properties of which he alone understood; and of ordinary sweet flowers, such as bees love to suck. He set up bee-hives and sold the honey. He distilled lavender and bergamotte for perfumes; he converted his herbs and roots into medicines, which he supplied to the poor people around; charging so small a price for them that it could scarcely more than cover the cost of making, and not charging at all in quarters that he knew might find it difficult to pay. At the end of about ten years from his first appearance, he knocked down the old shed, and built up a convenient cottage in its place: doing it all with his own sole pair of hands. And the years went on and on; and Abel Crew and his cottage, and his herbs, and his flowers, and his bees, and his medicines, were just as much of an institution in the parish as was the Grange itself.

He and I were good friends. I liked him. You know how I take likes and dislikes to faces; and I rarely saw one that I liked as I liked Abel Crew's. Not for its beauty; though it really was beautiful, with its perfect shape and delicately carved features; but for its unmistakable

look of goodness and its innate refinement. Perhaps also for the deep, far-seeing, and often *sad* expression that sat in the earnest eyes. He was old now; sixty, I daresay; slender and very upright still; his white hair brushed back from his forehead and worn rather long. What his original condition of life might have been did not transpire: he never talked of it. More than once I had seen him reading Latin books; and though he fell into the diction of the country people around when talking with them, he could change his tones and language when conversing with his betters. A character, no doubt he was, but a man to be respected. A man of religion, too—attending church regularly twice on a Sunday, wet or dry, and carrying his religion into the little things of every-day life.

His style of dress was old-fashioned and peculiar. So far as I saw, it never varied. A stout coat, waistcoat, and breeches every day, all of one colour—beaver, with leather gaiters buttoned nearly to the knee. On Sundays he wore a suit of black velvet, and a frilled shirt. His breeches were tied at the knee with black ribbon, in which was a plain, shining steel buckle; buckles to match shone in his shoes. His stockings were black, and in the winter he wore black cloth gaiters. In short, on Sundays Abel Crew looked like a fine old-fashioned English gentleman, and would have been taken for one. The woman who did up his linen declared he was more particular over his shirt-frills than Sir Peter himself.

Strangers in the place would sometimes ask what he was. The answer was not easy to give. He was a botanist and herbalist, and made pills, and mixtures, and perfumes, and sold honey, and had built his cottage and planted out his garden, and lived alone, cooking his food and waiting on himself; doing all in fact with his own hands, and was very humble always. On the other side, he had travelled in his youth, he understood paintings, studied the stars, read his store of Latin and classical books, and now and then bought more, and was as good a doctor as Duffham himself. Some people said a better one. Certain it was, that more than once when legitimate medical nostrums had failed—calomel and blisters and bleeding—Abel Crew's simple decoctions and leaves had worked a cure. Look at young Mrs. Sterling at the Court. When that first baby of hers came to town—and a fine squalling young brat he was, with a mouth like a crocodile's!—gatherings arose in her chest or somewhere, one after another, and the agony was awful. Duffham's skill seemed to have gone a blackberrying, the other doctor's also, for neither of the two could do anything for her, and the Court thought she would have died of it. Upon that, some relation of old Sterling's was summoned from London—a great physician in great practice. He came in answer, and was liberal with his advice, telling them to try this and to try the other. But it did no good; and she only got worse. When they were all in despair, seeing

her increased weakness and the prolonged pain, the woman who nursed her spoke of old Abel Crew; she had known him cure in these cases when the doctor could not: and the poor young lady, willing to catch at a straw, told them to go for Abel Crew. Abel Crew took a prepared plaster of herbs with him, green leaves of some kind, and applied it. That night the patient slept more easily than she had for weeks; and in a short time was well.

But, skilful though he seemed to be in the science of herbs, as remedies for sickness and sores, Abel Crew never obtruded himself upon the ailing, or willingly interfered with the province of Duffham; he never would do it unless compelled in the interests of humanity. The patients he chiefly treated were the poor, those who could not have paid Duffham a coin worth thinking of. Duffham knew this. And, instead of being jealous of him, as some medical men might have been, or ridiculing him for a quack, Duffham liked and respected old Abel Crew. He was simple in his habits still: living chiefly upon bread-and-butter, with radishes or mustard-and-cress for a relish, cooking vegetables for his dinner, but rarely meat: and his drink was tea or spring water.

So that Abel Crew was rather a notable character amid us; and when it was known abroad that two of his pills had caused the death of Mrs. Reed's twins, there arose no end of a commotion.

It chanced that the same night this occurred, just about the time in fact that the unfortunate infants were taking down the pills under the superintendence of their mother and the blacksmith's wife, Abel Crew met with an accident; though it was curious enough that it should be so. In taking a pan of boiling herbs off the fire, he let one of the handles slip out of his fingers; it sent the pan down on that side, spilled a lot of the stuff, and scalded his left foot on the instep. Therefore he was about the last person to hear of the calamity; for his door was not open as usual the following morning, and nobody knocked to tell him.

Duffham was the first. Passing by on his morning rounds, the doctor heard the comments of the people, and it arrested him. It was so unusual a thing for Abel Crew not to be about, and for his door to be closed, that some of them had been arriving at a sensible conclusion—Abel Crew, knowing the mischief his pills had done, was shutting himself up within the house, unable to face his neighbours.

"Rubbish!" said Duffham. And he strode up the garden path, knocked at the door with his cane, and entered. Abel had dressed, but was lying down on the bed again to rest his lame foot.

Duffham would have asked to look at it; but he knew Abel Crew was as good at burns and scalds as he was. It had been doctored at once, and was now wrapped up in a handkerchief.

"The fire is nearly out," said Abel, "but it must have rest; by night

it will be quite out, and I shall be able to dress it with my healing salve. I am much obliged to you for coming in, sir: though in truth I don't know how you could have heard of the accident."

"Ah; news flies," said Duffham, evasively, knowing that he had not heard of the foot, or the neighbours either, and had come in for something altogether different. "What is this about the pills?"

"About the pills?" repeated Abel Crew, who had got up out of respect and was putting on his coat. "What pills, sir?"

The doctor told him what had happened. Hester Reed had given one of his pills to each of her babies, and both had died of it. Abel Crew listened quietly; his face and his eyes fixed on Duffham.

"The children cannot have died of the pills," said he, speaking as gently as you please. "Something else must have killed them."

"According to Hester Reed's account, nothing can have done it but the pills. The children had only taken their ordinary food throughout the day, and very little of that. George Reed came running to me in the night, but it was too late: one was gone before I got there. There could be no mistaking the children's symptoms — that they were poisoned."

"This is very strange," exclaimed Abel, looking troubled. "By what kind of poison?"

"Arsenic, I think. I ——"

But here they were interrupted. Dovey the blacksmith, hearing of the calamity, together with the fact that it was his wife who had assisted to administer the suspected doses, deemed it his duty to look into the affair a little, and to resent it. He had left his forge and a bar of iron reeking hot in it, and come tearing along in his leather apron, his shirt sleeves stripped up to the elbow and his arms grimy. A dark-eyed, good-natured little man in general, was Dovey, but exploding with rage at the present moment.

"Now then, Abel Crew, what do you mean by selling pills to poison people?" demanded he, pushing back the door with a bang and stepping in fiercely. Duffham, foreseeing there was going to be a contest, and having no time to waste, took his departure.

"I have not sold pills to poison people," replied Abel.

"Look here," said Dovey, folding his black arms, "be you a-going to eat them pills, or be you not? Come!"

"What do you mean, Dovey?"

"What do I mean! Ain't my meaning plain? Do you own to having selled a box of pills to Hester Reed last winter?—be you a thinking to eat that there fact, and deny of it? Come, Abel Crew?"

"I remember it well," readily spoke up Abel. "Mrs. Reed came here one day, complaining that her head ached continually and her side often had a dull pain in it, and asked me to give her something. I

did; I gave her a box of pills. It was early in January, I think. I know there was ice on the ground."

"Then, you do own to them pills," returned Dovey, more quietly, his fierceness subdued by Abel's civility. "It were you that furnished 'em?"

"I furnished the box of pills I speak of; that Hester Reed had from me in the winter. There's no mistake about that."

"And made 'em too?"

"Yes, and made 'em."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say that there; and now don't you go for to eat your words later, Abel Crew. Our Ann, my wife, helped to give them there two pills to the childern; and I'm not a-going to let her get into trouble over it. You've confessed to the pills, and I be a witness."

"My pills did not kill the children, Dovey," said Abel in a pleasant tone, putting his lame foot up on an opposite chair.

"Not kill 'em?"

"No, that they did not. I've not made pills all these years to poison children at last."

"But what done it if the pills didn't?"

"How can I say? 'Twasn't my pills."

"Dr. Duffham says it was the pills. And he ——"

"Dr. Duffham says it was?"

"Reed telled me that the doctor asked outright, all in a flurry, what his wife had give the babies, and she said she had give 'em nothing but them there two pills of Abel Crew's. Duffham said the pills must have had poison in 'em, and he asked for the box; and Hester Reed she give him the box, and he sealed it up afore their eyes with his own seal."

Abel nodded. He knew that any suspected medicine must in such a case be sealed up.

"And now that I've got that there word from ye, I'll say good-day to ye, neighbour, for I've left my forge to itself, and some iron red-hot in it. And I hope with all my heart and mind,"—the blacksmith turned round from the door to say more kindly, his good-nature cropping up again,—"that it'll turn out it *warn't* the pills, but some'at else: our Ann won't have no cause to be in a fright then."

Which was as much as to say that Ann Dovey was in a fright, don't you see.

That same afternoon, going past the common, I saw Abel Crew in his garden, sitting back against the cottage wall in the sun, his foot resting on a block of wood.

"How did it all happen, Abel?" I asked, running in. "Did you give Mrs. Reed the wrong pills?"

"No, sir," he answered, "I gave her the right pills; the pills I make expressly for such complaints as hers. But if I had, in one sense,

given her the wrong, they could not have brought about any such ill effect as this, for my pills are all innocent of poison."

"I should say it could not have been the pills that did the mischief, after all, then."

"You might swear it as well, Master Johnny, with perfect safety. What killed the poor children, I don't pretend to know, but my pills never did. I tried to get down as far as Reed's to enquire particulars, and found I could not. 'Twas a bit of ill-luck, the disabling myself just at this time."

"Shall you have to appear at the inquest to-morrow?"

He lifted his head quickly at the question—as though it surprised him. Perhaps not having cast his thoughts that way.

"Is there to be an inquest, Master Johnny?"

"I heard so from old Jones. He has gone over to see the coroner?"

"Well, I wish the investigation was all over and done with," said he. "It makes me uneasy, though I know I am innocent."

Looking at him sitting there in the glistening sun, at his beautiful face with its truthful eyes and its silver hair, it was next to impossible to believe he could be the author of the two children's death. Only—the best of us are liable to mistakes, and sometimes make them. I said as much.

"*I* made none, Master Johnny," was his answer. "When my pills come to be analysed—as of course they must be—they will be found pure and innocent."

The inquest did not take place till the Friday. Old Jones had fixed it for the Thursday, but the coroner put it off to the next day. And by the time Friday morning dawned, opinion had veered round, and was strongly in favour of Abel Crew. All the parish had been to see him, and his protestations, that he had never in his life put any kind of poison in his medicines, made a great impression. The pills could not have been in fault, said everybody. Dr. Duffham might have sealed them up as a matter of precaution, but the mischief would not be found there.

In the middle of Church Dykely, next door to Perkins the butcher's, stood the Silver Bear inn; a better sort of public-house, kept by Henry Rimmer. It was there that the inquest was held. Henry Rimmer himself and Perkins the butcher were two of the jurymen. Dobbs the blacksmith was another. They all dressed themselves in their Sunday-going clothes to attend it. It was called for two in the afternoon; and soon after that hour, the county coroner (who had dashed up to the Silver Bear in a fast gig, his clerk driving) and the jury trooped down to George Reed's cottage and took a look at the two pale little faces lying there side by side. Then they went back again and the proceedings began.

Of course as many spectators went crowding the room as could cram into it. Three or four chairs were there (besides those occupied by the jury at the table), and a bench stood against the wall. The bench was speedily fought for and filled; but Henry Rimmer's brother, constituting himself master of the ceremonies, reserved the chairs for what he called the "big people," meaning those of account in the place. The Squire was bowed into one; and to my surprise I got another. Why, I could not imagine, unless it was that they remembered I was the owner of George Reed's cottage. But I did not like to sit when so many old persons were standing, and I would not take the chair.

Some little time was occupied with preliminaries before what might be called the thick of the inquest set in. First of all, the coroner went into a passion because Abel Crew had not put in an appearance, asking old Jones if he supposed that was the way justice must be administered in England, and that he ought to have had Crew present. Old Jones, who was in a regular fluster with it all, and his legs more gouty than ever, told the coroner, calling him "his worship," that he had understood Crew meant to be present. Upon which the coroner sharply answered that "understanding" went for nought, and Jones should know his business better.

However, in walked Abel Crew in the midst of the contest. His delayed arrival was caused by his difficulty in getting his damaged foot there; which had been accomplished by the help of a stick and somebody's arm. Abel had dressed himself in his black velvet suit; and as he took off his hat on entering and bowed respectfully to the coroner, I declare he could not be taken for anything but a courtly gentleman of the old school. Nobody offered him a chair. I wished I had not given up mine: he should have had it.

Evidence was first tendered of the death of the children, and of the terrible pain they had died in. Duffham and a medical man, who was a stranger and had helped at the post-mortem, testified to arsenic being the cause of death. The next question was, how had it got administered. A rumour arose in the room that the pills had been analysed; but the result had not transpired. Everybody could see a small parcel standing on the table before the coroner, and knew by its shape that it must be the pill-box.

Hester Reed was called. She said (giving her evidence very quietly, just a sobbing sigh every now and then alone betraying that she felt it) that she was the wife of George Reed. Her two little ones—twins, aged eleven months and a half—had been ailing for a day or two, seemed feverish, would not eat their food, were very cross at times and unnaturally still at others, and she came to the conclusion that their teeth must be plaguing them, and thought she would give them some mild physic. Mrs. Todhetley, the Squire's lady at Dyke Manor, had called

in on the Tuesday afternoon, and agreed with her that some mild physic ——

"Confine your statement to what is evidence," interrupted the coroner, in a stern voice.

Hester Reed, looking scared at the check, and perhaps not knowing what was evidence and what not, went on in the best way she could. She and Ann Dovey—who had been neighbourly enough to look in and help her—had given the children a pill apiece in the evening after they were undressed, mashing the pill up in a little sugar and warm water. She then put them to bed upstairs and went to bed herself not long after. In the night she and her husband were awoke by the babies' screams, and they thought it must be convulsions. Her husband lighted the fire and ran for Dr. Duffham; but one had died before the doctor could get there, and the other died close upon it.

"What food had you given them during the day?" asked the coroner.

"Very little indeed, sir. They wouldn't take it."

"What did the little that they did take consist of?"

"It were soaked bread, sir, with milk and some sprinkled sugar. I tried them with some potato mashed up in a spoonful o' broth at midday—we'd had a bit o' bil'ed neck o' mutton for dinner—but they both turned from it."

"Then all they took that day was bread soaked in milk and sweetened with sugar?"

"Yes, it were, sir. But the bread was soaked in warm water and the milk and sugar was put in afterwards. 'Twas but the veriest morsel they'd take, poor little dears!"

"Was the bread—and the milk—and the sugar, the same that the rest of your household used?"

"In course it were, sir. My other children ate plenty of it. *Their* appetites didn't fail 'em."

"Where did you get the warm water from that you say you soaked the bread in?"

"Out o' the tea-kettle, sir. It was the water that I biled for our tea morning and night."

"The deceased children, then, had absolutely no food given to them apart from what you had yourselves?"

"Not a scrap, sir. Not a drop."

"Except the pills."

"Excepting of them in course, sir. None o' the rest of us wanted no physic."

"Where did you procure these pills?"

She went into the history of the pills. Giving the full account of them, as already related.

"By your own showing, witness, it must be four months, or thereabouts, since you had that box of pills from Abel Crew," spoke the

coroner. "How do you know that the two pills you administered to the deceased children came from the same box?"

Hester Reed's eyes opened in a wide stare. She looked as surprised as though she had been asked whether she got the two pills from the moon.

"Yes, yes," interposed one of the jury, "how do you know it was the same box?"

"Why, gentlemen, I had no other box of pills at all but that," she said, when speech came to her. "We've not had no physic but that in the cottage since winter, nor for ever so long afore. I'll swear it were the same box, sirs; there can't be no mistake about it."

"Did you leave it about in the way of people?" resumed the coroner. "So that it might be handled by anybody who might come into your cottage?"

"No, sir," she answered, earnestly. "I never kept the pill-box but in one place, and that was on the top of the high press out of hands' way. I put it there the first night Abel Crew gave it me, and when I wanted to get a pill or two out for my own taking, I'd used to step on a chair—for it's too high for me to reach up without—and help myself. The box have never been took from the place at all, sir, till Tuesday night, when I brought it downstairs with me. When I've wanted to dust the press-top, I've just lifted the pill-box with one hand and passed the duster along under it with the other, as I stood on the chair. It's the same box, sir; I'll swear to that much; and it's the same pills."

Strong testimony. The coroner paused a moment.

"You swear that, you say. You are quite sure?"

"Sir, I am sure and positive. The box was never took from its place since Abel Crew give it me, till I reached up for it on Tuesday evening and carried it down."

"You had been in the habit of taking these pills yourself, you say?

"I took two three or four times when I first had 'em, sir; but since then I've felt better and not wanted any."

"Did you feel any inconvenience from them? Any pain?"

"Not a bit, sir. As I said to Ann Dovey that night, when she up and asked whether they was fit pills to give the childern, they seemed as mild as milk."

"Should you know the box again, witness?"

"Law yes, sir, what should hinder me?" returned Hester Reed, inwardly marvelling at what seemed so superfluous a question.

The coroner undid the paper, and handed the box to her. She was standing close to him, on the other side his clerk—who sat, writing down the evidence. "Is this the box?" he asked. "Look at it well."

Mrs. Reed did as she was bid: turned it about and looked "well."

"Yes, sir, it is the same box," said she. "That is, I am nearly sure of it."

"What do you mean by *nearly* sure?" quickly asked the coroner, catching at the word. "Have you any doubt?"

"Not no moral doubt at all, sir. Only them pill-boxes is all so like one another. Yes, sir, I'm sure it is the same box."

"Open it, and look at the pills. Are they, in your judgment, the same?"

"Just the same, sir," she answered, after taking off the lid. "One might a'most know 'em anywhere. Only ——"

"Only what?" demanded the coroner, at her pause.

"Well, sir, I fancied I had rather more left—six or seven, say. There's only five here."

The coroner made no answer to that. He took the box from her and put on the lid. We soon learnt that two had been taken out for the purpose of being analysed.

For who should loom into the room at that juncture but Pettipher, the druggist from Piefinch Cut. He had been analysing the pills in a hasty way in obedience to orders received half an hour ago, and came to tell the result. The pills contained arsenic, he said; not enough to kill a grown person, he thought, but enough to kill a child. As Pettipher was only a small man (in a business point of view) and sold groceries as well as drugs, and spectacles and ear-trumpets, some of us did not think much of his opinion, and fancied the pills should have been analysed by Duffham. That was just like old Jones: giving work to the wrong man.

While Ann Dovey was being called, who would be the next witness, and the coroner had his head bent over his clerk's notes, speaking to him in an undertone, Abel Crew suddenly asked to be allowed to look at the box of pills. The coroner, never lifting his head, just pushed the box downwards on the green cloth; and one of the jury handed it over his shoulder to Abel Crew.

"This is not the box I gave Mrs. Reed," said Abel, in a clear, firm tone, after diving into it with his eyes and nose. "Nor are these the pills."

Up went the coroner's head with a start. He had supposed the request to see the box came from a juryman. It might have been irregular for Abel Crew to be allowed so much; but as it arose partly through the coroner's own fault, he was too wise to make a clatter over it.

"What is that you say?" he asked, stretching out his hand for the box as eagerly as though it had contained gold.

"That this box and these pills are not the same that I furnished to Mrs. Reed, sir," replied Abel, advancing and placing the box in the coroner's hand. "They are not, indeed."

"Not the same pills and box!" exclaimed the coroner. "Why,

man, you have heard the evidence of the witness, Hester Reed, and might see for yourself that she was speaking nothing but truth. Don't talk nonsense here."

"But they are *not* the same, sir," respectfully persisted Abel. "I know my own pills, and I know my own boxes: these are neither the one nor the other."

"Now that won't do; you must take us all for fools," exploded the coroner, who was a man of quick temper. "Just you stand back and be quiet."

"Never a pill-box went out from my hands, sir, but it had my little private mark upon it," persisted Abel. "That box does not bear the mark."

"What is the mark, pray?" asked the coroner.

"Four little dots of ink on the inside of the rim of the lid, sir; and four similar dots on the inside of the box near the edge. They are so faint that a casual observer might not notice them; but they are always there. Of all the pill-boxes now in my house, sir—and I suppose there may be two or three dozen of them—you will not find one but has the mark."

Some whispering had been going on in different parts of the room; but this silenced it. You might have heard a pin drop. The words seemed to make an impression on the coroner: they and Abel Crew were both so earnest.

"You assert also that the pills are not yours," spoke the coroner, who was known to be fond of desultory conversations while holding his inquests. "What proof have you of that?"

"No proof; that is, no proof that I can advance tangible to the eye or ear. But I am certain by the look of them, that those were never my pills."

All this took the jury aback; the coroner also. It had seemed to some of them an odd thing that Hester Reed should have swallowed two or three of the pills at once without their entailing an ache or a pain, and yet that one each had poisoned the babies. Perkins the butcher observed to the coroner that the box must have been changed since Mrs. Reed helped herself from it. Upon which the coroner, after pulling at his whiskers for a moment as if in thought, called out for Mrs. Reed to return.

But when she did so, and was further questioned, she only kept to what she had said before, strenuously denying that the box *could* have been changed. It had never been touched by any hands but her own while it stood in its place atop of the press, and had never been removed from it at all until she took it downstairs on the past Tuesday night.

"Is the room where this press stands your own sleeping-room?" asked the coroner.

"No, sir. It's the other room, where my three children sleep."

"Could these children get to the box?"

"Dear no, sir! 'Twould be quite impossible."

"Had any one an opportunity of handling the box when you took it down stairs on Thursday night?" went on the coroner after a pause.

"Only Mrs. Dovey, sir. Nobody else was there."

"Did she touch it?"

"She laid hold of it to look at the pills."

"Did you leave her *alone* with it?"

"No, sir. Leastways—yes I did for a minute or so, while I went into the back'us to get the sugar and a saucer and spoon."

"Had she the box in her hands when you returned?"

"Yes, sir, I think she had. I think she was still a smelling at the pills. I know the poor little innocents was lying one on one knee, and one on t'other, all flat, and her two hands was lifted with the box in 'em."

"It was after that that you took the pills out of it to give the children?"

"Yes, sir; directly after. But Ann Dovey wouldn't do nothing wrong to the pills, sir."

"That will do," said the coroner in his curt way. "Call Ann Dovey."

Ann Dovey walked forward with a face as red as her new bonnet-strings. She had heard the whole colloquy. Possessing scant veneration for coroners at the best of times, and none for the jury at present assembled, she did not feel disposed to keep down her temper.

The few first questions asked her, however, afforded no opportunity for resentment, for they were put quietly, and tended only to extract confirmation of Mrs. Reed's evidence, as to the fetching the pill-box from above stairs and the administering of the pills. Then the coroner cleared his throat.

"Did you see the last witness, Hester Reed, go into the back kitchen to get a spoon and saucer?"

"I saw her go and fetch 'em from somewhere," replied Ann Dovey, who felt instinctively the ball was beginning, and gave the reins to her tongue accordingly.

"Did you take charge of the pill-box while she was gone?"

"I had it in my hand, if you mean that."

"Did anybody come into the kitchen during that interval?"

"No they didn't," was the tart response.

"You were alone save for the two infants?"

"I were. What of it?"

"Now, witness, did you do anything with that box? Did you, for instance, exchange it for another?"

"I think you ought to be ashamed o' yourselves, all on you, to sit and ask a body such a thing!" exploded Mrs. Dovey. "If I'd knowed

the bother that was to spring up, I'd have chucked the box, pills and all, into the fire first. I wish I had!"

"Was the box, that you gave to Hester Reed on her return, the same box she left with you? Were the pills the same pills?"

"Why, where d'ye think I could have got another box from?" asked she in a shrieking tone. "D'ye suppose I carry boxes and pills about with me? I bain't so fond o' physic as all that comes to."

"Dovey takes pills on occasion for that giddiness he gets; I've seen him take 'em; mayhap ye'd picked up a box of his," spoke Dobbs the blacksmith, mildly.

That was adding fuel to fire. Two of a trade don't agree. Dovey and Dobbs were both blacksmiths: the one in Church Dykely, the other in Piefinch Cut, not much more, so to say, than a stone's throw from one another. The men were good friends enough; but their respective ladies were apt to regard jealously all work taken to the rival establishment. Any other of the jurymen might have made the remark with comparative impunity; not so Dobbs. And, besides the turn the inquiry seemed to be taking, Mrs. Dovey had not been easy about it in her mind from the first; proof of which was furnished by the call, already told of, made by her husband on Abel Crew.

"Dovey takes pills on occasion, do he!" she shrilly retorted. "And what do you take, Bill Dobbs? Pints o' beer when you can get 'em. Who lamed Poole's white horse the t'other day a shoeing of him?"

"Silence!" sternly interrupted the coroner. While Dobbs, conscious of the self-importance imparted to him by the post he was now filling, and of the necessity of maintaining the dignity of demeanour which he was apt to put on with his best clothes, bore the aspersion with equanimity and a stolid face.

"Attend to me, witness, and confine yourself to replying to the questions I put," continued the coroner. "Did you take with you any pills or pill-box of your own when you went to Mrs. Reed's that evening?"

"No I *didn't*," returned Ann Dovey, the emphasis culminating in a sob: and why she should have set on to shiver and shake was more than the jury could understand.

"Do you wear pockets?"

"What if I do?" she said. But her lips took a white shade, and I thought she was trying to brave it out.

"Had you a pocket on that evening?"

"Heaven be good to me!" I heard her mutter under her breath. And if ever I saw a woman look frightened nearly to death, Ann Dovey looked it then.

"Had you a pocket on that evening, witness?" repeated the coroner sharply.

"Y—es."

"What articles were in it? Do you recollect? Come!"

"It were a key or two," came the answer at length, her very teeth chattering and all the impudence suddenly gone out of her. "And my thimble, sir;—and some coppers;—and a part of a nutmeg;—and—and I don't remember nothing else, sir."

"No box of pills? You are sure you had not that?"

"Haven't I said so, sir?" she rejoined, bursting into a frantic flood of tears. For which, and for the sudden agitation, nobody could see any reason: and perhaps it was only that which made the coroner harp upon the same string. Her demeanour had become suspicious.

"You had no poison of any kind in your pocket, then?"

But he asked the question in jest more than earnest. For when she went into hysterics, instead of replying, he let her go. He was used to see witnesses scared at being brought before him.

Well, to make short of the affair now, for there is not room to get it all in here, though I had thought there would be, the verdict was not arrived at that day. When other witnesses had been examined, the coroner addressed the jury. Ten of them listened deferentially, and were quite prepared to return a verdict of Manslaughter against Abel Crew: seemed red-hot to do it, in fact. But two of them dissented. They were not satisfied, they said; and they held out for adjourning the inquest to see if any more light could be thrown upon the affair. As they evidently had the sense of the room with them, the coroner yielded and adjourned the inquest in a temper.

And then it was discovered that the name was not Crew but Carew. Abel himself corrected the coroner. Upon that, the coroner sharply demanded why it was that he had lived under a false name.

"Nay sir," replied Abel, as dignified as you please, "I have not had any intention of doing so. When I first came to this neighbourhood I gave my name correctly—Carew: but the people at once converted it into Crew by their mode of pronunciation."

"At any rate, you must have sanctioned it."

"Tacitly I have. What did it signify? When I have had occasion to write my name—but that has been very rare—I have written it Carew. Old Sir Peter Chavasse knew it was Carew, and used to call me so; but that's many a year gone by. Indeed, sir, I have had no reason to conceal my name."

"That's enough," said the coroner, cutting him short. "Stand back Abel Carew. The proceedings are adjourned to this day week."

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

(To be concluded next month.)

MAGGIE'S BOUQUET.

SOME people called it a church festival. It was in fact only a bazaar, held in the school-house; the proceeds obtained from it were to augment the fund being got up to purchase a new organ. Subscriptions for church purposes don't flow in in villages as they do in large and populous towns. Our little church at Mendon sadly needed the organ, and we heartily hoped to be able to obtain it.

But the sale of the wares flagged. All the gentry had been in; the end of the day was approaching, and the stalls had not parted with half their goods. When the devices and persuasions of the fair saleswomen seemed to be exhausted, somebody proposed that a magnificent bouquet possessed by one of these should be offered for sale: its purchaser to bestow it upon the prettiest young lady present, a committee of gentlemen to decide upon the successful candidate. The two acknowledged beauties of Mendon (each of whom presided at a stall, and hated each other like poison) lifted their heads complaisantly at the proposal, for each felt assured in her own heart that she herself alone should win it. And this fact might be unmistakably read in both their faces.

A young girl stood watching them with evident appreciation and amusement; and then a mischievous smile played about her lips and increased the merry lustre of her eyes. It was Margaret Wilson. She was not beautiful at all; quite plain when beside those other two beauties; but she had a lively, pleasant, happy face, and a bright fresh healthy complexion. Everybody liked Maggie Wilson. Laughing, she ran up to Mrs. Neale, the present owner of the bouquet.

"May I take it round first, Mrs. Neale?"

"What—you, Maggie? What for?"

"To get votes."

"Well, take it, Maggie, and get all you can," said the lady, laughing. "You have a right, I suppose—and you have asked first."

The words, good-naturedly spoken, evidently told the room, as well as Maggie herself, that, *she* had no chance, though she did try. Maggie took the flowers, and spoke as she passed the two young-lady beauties.

"I am sure you both think nobody has a chance but yourselves," she said in a half-joking and very pleasant voice; "but I mean to gain this prize."

"Indeed!" answered one of them. "It will be news to the world—Maggie Wilson's getting a prize for beauty."

Maggie nodded. "I intend to have these flowers," she said, a pretty show of emphasis on the words. "I shall ask everyone o the gentlemen to vote for me."

"If I could not gain them without begging, I would rather not gain them at all," said Ada Cross. "It will be looked upon as a very bold venture."

"Not at all," said Maggie. "It is only a bit of fun. Good-bye! I am going to begin my canvass."

"You will not dare to do it, Maggie Wilson!"

"Will I not! Just watch and see."

She went dancing up to a good-natured looking man standing near—the village lawyer; smiles dimpling her face.

"Mr. Rigg, will you not vote for me?"

"Certainly I will," he answered, laughing pleasantly; "with all my heart, Miss Margaret. I'd give ten votes if I had them to a bonnie lass like you."

"Thank you!" cried Maggie, in glee. "That's vote the first," she added, looking back at the beauties. "Oh, I shall gain it."

Away she went, on her personal canvass. The gentlemen entered heartily into the spirit of the thing, and promised her right and left. They all knew Maggie and all liked her. Her smiles increased, her cheeks and her eyes grew brighter; but with all the "soliciting" she was a gentle, modest-mannered maiden still.

"Miss Wilson," whispered a lady in her ear, "a stranger is standing yonder: there, over by the door: go and ask for his vote."

"Oh, I scarcely like to do that. He does not know me."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I am not afraid; I will go," said Maggie, with sudden resolution. "But he does look very serious and dignified. I don't care; I'll do it."

She approached the stranger referred to: a fine, gentlemanly-looking man of some thirty years. With glowing cheeks and a deprecating smile, she explained her errand, and asked him to subscribe the shilling to the bouquet, and to give her his vote.

"Certainly," he replied, "I shall be most happy. May I purchase as many votes as I please?"

"Yes. But I only asked for one."

"Then you shall have that one with nineteen added to it," he returned; evidently pleased with the bright face before him.

"Oh, thank you; thank you! I think I may be sure of the bouquet now."

"Are you so very fond of flowers?"

"Yes, I am. But—I began this just in a bit of fun; because others thought *they* were sure of it, and that I had no chance," she ingenuously confessed. "Of course, I should have had no chance if it went by merit. That is, by looks."

"Of course not," acquiesced the stranger. But his tone did not sound like a real one.

Maggie won the prize. And for the time being was made much of;

deadly whiteness. Putting that aside, Miss Cross retained calmness of manner.

"Poetry! oh dear no. I could not write a line if I tried."

"Perhaps your friend writes it better than you do?"

"I am sure she does not. Were you thinking of asking either of us to write some? What an idea!" she added with a loud, affected laugh.

"No, I was not thinking of that. There's the signal to take our places: I must go and find my partner. Do not forget, Miss Cross, that the next is my dance."

He went off to find Maggie, and requested the honour of her hand for the first quadrille; and subsequently he might have been seen whirling her in a waltz. Ada Cross was taken by him next; and then he went back to Maggie again. In short, it seemed to be Maggie, and only Maggie, all the evening. The room noticed it. People made comments freely.

"Maggie," said he, calling her so for the first time as Mrs. Wilson was preparing to depart, "do you know what the gossips are busily saying about you and me?"

"I—yes—I heard something just now," she answered with hesitation, but in her strict truth.

"Well, what had we better do about it?"

Maggie's fingers were trembling so much that she could not fasten her cloak. Mrs. Wilson was looking round.

"Please let me go, Mr. Stanhope. Mamma is wondering what can keep me."

"I will let you go in a minute," whispered he. "Maggie, my darling, there is only one obvious course open to us to satisfy the chatterers. You must give me a right to answer for us both."

"I have no good looks,—and no money," pleaded Maggie. "You cannot *mean* it—that you want *me*."

"Not want you! You silly child! What else has kept me at that blessed hostelrie, the old Brown Bear, but you, do you suppose. May I call on your mother to-morrow morning, Maggie?"

Maggie gave no answer in words. But her hand insensibly lingered in Mr. Stanhope's. Sufficient permission.

And very soon Mendon lost Maggie Wilson. For Mr. Stanhope took her away with him to his own home.

THE SENSATION NOVEL.

IT is scarcely necessary to remark that the Sensation Novel is extremely popular at the present day. I have therefore chosen it for the heading of this paper, because to a certain extent it may be taken as a type of the times. We have, indeed, besides plenty of other kinds of fiction, tales of fashionable life, philosophical novels, and novels with a *purpose*, political or artistic :—but all these fall far short of the general popularity enjoyed by the real wholesale, thoroughgoing, Sensation Story. And yet we are told that we live in dull times—that the days of romance, like the golden age, or the days of chivalry, are past away, never to return. But surely this cannot be true of the age which has witnessed such scenes as the Commune in Paris, or the French and German war. Because soldiers do not now go to battle clad in armour, with sword and battle-axe, singing the praises of their own mighty deeds like Tennyson's heroes in the Idyls of the King, we are apt to consider that it is all a mere matter of business—that the new inventions in fire-arms leave no room for individual daring—and that war now, instead of being a fit theme to awaken the fire of the poet, or kindle the genius of the minstrel, is a matter more deserving the attention of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the members of the Peace Society.

Those were the days of romance, say some, when every road had its band of highwaymen—when Dick Turpin was causing more excitement by his daring deeds between London and York than could be got up by all the rest of the world put together. Or, to look back a few years before this to the time when coaches had no outside places at all; when the starting of a vehicle called the *Flying Coach*, and which undertook to do the whole journey between London and Oxford in one day, was looked upon as a perfect wonder. Macaulay has described the startling experiment. The Vice-Chancellor, by notice affixed to all public places, prescribed the hour and place of departure. At six in the morning the carriage began to move from before the ancient front of All Souls' College, and at seven in the evening the adventurous gentlemen, who had been the first to run the risk, were safely deposited at their inn in London. Yes, those were the days for adventures; when the traveller who wished to move expeditiously and was not encumbered with much baggage, performed a long journey on horseback; when the mounted highwayman, a character now only known to us from books, was a living fact, who haunted all the waste tracks which lay on the great routes near London; when the Cambridge scholars trembled as they approached Epping Forest, even in broad daylight.

We never now hear of such adventures as happened when Charles

the Second was king. How Claude Duval, the French page of the Duke of Richmond, took to the road, became captain of a formidable gang, and had the honour to be named first in a royal proclamation against notorious offenders; how, at the head of his troop, he stopped a lady's coach, in which there was a booty of four hundred pounds: how he took only one hundred, and suffered the fair owner to ransom the rest by dancing a coranto with him on the heath; how his vivacious gallantry stole away the hearts of all women; how his dexterity at sword and pistol made him the terror of men; how at length, in the year 1670, he was seized when overcome by wine; how dames of high rank visited him in prison, and with tears interceded for his life; how the king would have granted a pardon, but for the interference of Judge Morton, the terror of highwaymen, who threatened to resign his office unless the law was carried into full effect; and how, after execution, the corpse lay in state, with all the pomp of escutcheons, waxlights, black hangings, and mutes, till the same cruel judge who had intercepted the mercy of the crown sent officers to disturb the obsequies. No, it is quite true that we have nothing now quite equal to this picture, as drawn by Lord Macaulay; yet still there is quite as much sentiment, quite as much romance in England now as two hundred years ago. True, nobody now, not even the most dreamy young lady, would like to look forward to a life of honeysuckles and clematis in company with Damon and a crook. Yet the novels of the day prove that there is no diminution of the romantic force of the English nation. Heroes of the Claude Duval school are still in favour. We still meet with Paul Cliffords, and the eagerness with which an interesting mauvais sujet is run after to-day, proves that human nature is still the same, and likely so to continue.

The feminine influence that pervades it is a strongly characteristic feature of the literature of the time. Women are of much account in it, and women produce a large share of it. The great bales of fiction which are constantly manufactured owe their chief proportions and bulk to female talent and diligence; and, bearing in mind that this sort of reading forms a very considerable part of the amusement of young people at present, the amount of harm done by it is by no means insignificant.

In alluding, however, to modern female novelists, we should carefully distinguish between the ladies whose works are a pleasure to read and those who seem to take a delight in outraging morals and probability. It is generally when female novelists undertake to draw characters of the opposite sex that they most frequently fall into absurdity. The Guy Livingstone stamp of humanity is not the most pleasing even when well painted, but it becomes utterly unbearable when it is burlesqued. And yet, with the same ease with which a fashion is changed, and a coal-scuttle bonnet becomes by substitution

a wisp of dead hair and a beetle, a new vista is opened: and, withdrawing from pictures of their own sex, the ladies began to present us with studies of ours. Taking up the Rev. Charles Kingsley's doctrine of muscles, and finding in the pages of some male writer the supposed correct style of conversation, mostly made up of slang and twaddle, the novel-reading public all at once became overrun with an army of monsters, quite unlike, it is to be hoped, to any creatures in heaven or earth. There are novels now in circulation that will certainly puzzle the future student of the Victorian era. Thackeray used to say an English author dare not now describe a man in the fashion that Fielding described Tom Jones, or Smollett drew Count Fathom.

Of late the ladies have been having it all their own way in the realms of fiction. There was a time when the chief characters in fiction were men, and when to find a female portrait was a rare exception. There was a time when such characters as we now commonly encounter would be looked upon as the wildest dreams of a distempered imagination. How colourless, for instance, are some of Sir Walter Scott's heroines, when compared with the men in whom he delights. Now-a-days all the more important characters seem to be women. Our novelists have suddenly discovered an unworked mine of wealth, and they give us jewels of women in many a casket. This is not to be wondered at when the writer herself belongs to the fair sex, but strange to say their masculine rivals follow in the same track. Nor do we find this tendency evident only in prose fiction. Look at Mr. Tennyson: a great poet is supposed to be the most perfect representative of his age; and the greater the poet, the more attention people pay to his opinions. Now the greater part of the Laureate's poetry may be described as a dream of fair women. For one man, he paints half a dozen women; and we remember the women better than the men. We remember the Princess and all her trials; we remember Dora, Lilian, Enid, Elaine, Vivien, Guinevere, and the Gardener's Daughter, and many more. How many men of the Laureate's drawing can we set against so splendid an array of feminine excellence?

But though the ladies have flourished and still are flourishing so successfully in this branch of literature, still we must venture to remind them that although they very nearly, yet they did not quite, found the school of the Sensation Novel. I think we must grant this honour to Horace Walpole, for this species of composition cannot be traced higher than the "Castle of Otranto." The following curious account of the origin and composition of this romance is given by the author himself, in a letter dated March 9th, 1769. "Shall I confess to you," he writes, "what was the origin of this romance? I waked one morning in the beginning of last June, from a dream, of which all I could recover was that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head like mine, filled with gothic story), and that on

the uppermost bannister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew in my hands, and I grew fond of it. In short I was so engrossed with my tale, which I completed in two months, that one evening I wrote from the time I had drank tea, about six o'clock, till half-an-hour after one in the morning, when my hand and fingers were so weary that I could not hold the pen to finish the sentence. You may laugh at my earnestness, but if I have amused you by retracing, with any fidelity, the manners of ancient days, I am content."

This, I fear, is rather a long quotation, but it is interesting as the description of the birth, as it were, of the grandfather of "sensation." In the "Castle of Otranto" we find quite a surfeit of all the elements of a sensation novel. Have we not skulls and skeletons, sliding panels, damp vaults, trap doors, and dismal rooms? Is there not a sword which requires a hundred men to lift it; a hero imprisoned in a helmet; to say nothing of groans: gothic windows through which no light can pierce (rather a common failing in gothic windows now) and passages leading no-where, *ad lib.?* Certainly, if the hearers are not all ears, at any rate the writer is all tale. Without any doubt the "Castle of Otranto" is the first sensation novel, and it was written by a man.

But next to him comes a woman, and the lady's name is Mrs. Radcliffe: and to her I must devote a few words. Nor is there any occasion to say anything about the writers of the day, since everyone is familiar with their works, with all their merits and defects. Like all other of her school, the first object which Mrs. Radcliffe sets before her to accomplish in her works is to raise powerful emotions of surprise, awe, and especially terror, by means and agents apparently supernatural. To effect this laudable end, which was pretty much the same as that aimed at by the ancient tragedians to stir up the passions of their hearers, she places her characters and transports her readers amid scenes which are calculated strongly to excite the mind, and predispose it for spectral illusions. She prepares her readers for the nightmare which is to follow, by taking them through a series of gothic castles, gothic abbeys, and subterranean passages, where banditti flourish and winds howl, just as one might prepare one's body for a sensation dream by taking a good supper of lobsters and champagne shortly before going to bed. That which separates the works of Mrs. Radcliffe chiefly from those by which they were preceded is, that in the "Castle of Otranto" and the "Old English Baron" the machinery is in fact supernatural; whereas the means and agents employed by Mrs. Radcliffe in the "Romance of the Forest," and the "Mysteries of Udolpho," and others, are in reality human, and such as can be, or at least are professed to be, explained by natural events. Many of my readers can doubtless recollect the feelings of disappointment which they felt on finding the mysterious object which

has been carefully concealed behind a curtain throughout three volumes of the "Mysteries of Udolpho," turn out at the end of the fourth to be only a wax figure. Another characteristic of the style of this very talented woman is the great freedom with which she indulged in landscape painting. She has even gone so far in one of her books as to make the sun set twice the same evening. One is sometimes inclined to lament that she did not follow the example of Mr. Puff in the play: "I open with a clock striking to beget an awful attention in the audience—it is also a mark of the time, which is four o'clock in the morning, and it saves a description of the rising sun, and a great deal about gilding the eastern hemisphere." Yet though we may smile at these little oversights, still some of Mrs. Radcliffe's landscapes are eminently beautiful, reminding us as specimens of word painting of Mr. Ruskin, and our wonder is increased when we reflect, that though most of her scenes are laid in Italy or Sicily, she herself had never moved out of the narrow circle of an English ordinary humdrum life. She has also been honoured by Lord Byron—no mean judge on such a matter—by having her name immortalised in a line of "Childe Harold." Miss Austin, in one of her charming tales, has smiled good-naturedly at her sister novelist's love of the marvellous. She makes her heroine, on paying a visit to Northanger Abbey, expect to find all manner of wonders in the old house. Her attention is drawn to an old piece of furniture in her bedroom, and on looking into it she discovers in one of the drawers a bundle of papers, which she hopes to contain the revelation of some unfortunate prisoner; but alas! it only proves to be a collection of old washing bills.

As we are now in the very midst of sensation, it will not be going far out of the way to relate a sensation fact. Some time ago I met with the following startling story, which was told by the Archbishop of Bordeaux to the French Senate a few years since. A young priest was struck with a cataleptic fit in a crowded church on a holiday in the year 1826. He fell down apparently quite dead, with the words of prayer upon his lips. They carried him out, and after some hours began to make preparations for his interment. He could not see; but all the time he could hear; and the nature of what he heard was by no means agreeable. The doctor duly declared that he was dead: and, after various inquiries as to his age, birthplace, and other particulars, gave orders that the funeral should take place on the next day. The venerable bishop of the church where the young priest was in the habit of officiating came, and, standing at the foot of the couch on which lay the body, recited the "De profundis;" they next measured him for his shroud, and then, as night advanced, they left him in a state of inexpressible agony such as a living being in such a situation may perhaps imagine. At last there sounded a voice in his ear with whose loved accents he was familiar as a friend of his youth. The sound of

that voice was miraculous, and urged him to make a superhuman effort. The young priest appeared next day in the choir, restored again to life as it were out of the very jaws of death.

It cannot be denied, I think, after what has been said, that the present is an age of sensation. It is at the same time an age of reading desks and writing desks: this implies that it is also an age of thought. But of late years critics have been so impressed with the craving which exists among us for sensation, that they cannot bring themselves to believe in the thoughtfulness of a people demanding fresh excitement. But it is shallow to pick out the frivolities of the day as its regnant chracteristics. Perhaps it may be the very thoughtfulness of the age which leads people to seek relaxation in what appears light and almost childish amusements. Thus, when even many of our novelists indulge us with reflections, theories, schemes for universal improvement, and a good deal more which might generally be left out with advantage, is it to be wondered at that we are in our moments of leisure compelled to seek refuge from thought in sensation, and so pass from one extreme to another?

There is a writer, before concluding, whose name must not be left altogether without mention even in a sketch as brief as the present. In Miss Bronte's "Jane Eyre" a chord was struck which has vibrated very widely ever since the publication of that remarkable work. There are scenes in it often of the most startling and absorbing interest. Nothing can appeal more strongly to the imagination of the reader than the description of the mad wife of Rochester; the secret of the barred rooms; his almost marriage with Jane, which would have been bigamy; the fire, and that tremendous scene where the maniac is beheld with her long black hair streaming against the flames as she stood; where the husband ascends through the skylight in the roof, calling "Bertha." He approaches her; and then she yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement. Though Rochester himself is not a pleasing character, still there is nothing in his conduct, even when most harsh and disagreeable, at all resembling the fierce and brutal bearing of some popular heroes of the present day. In the trials to which he is exposed from the terrible mad woman who is bound to him in the relation of wife, we may fairly draw some excuse for his restless and occasionally savage manner, and at his worst he never transgresses the boundary which separates the gentleman from the snob. It is indeed wonderful how a girl brought up in a remote country parsonage, seeing little of any sort of society, and having in consequence so few opportunities of observing character, should have succeeded in drawing a hero at once so complex in his nature and yet so true to life. Nor has she repeated herself in either of her subsequent works. "Shirley" and "Villette" belong to quite a different class of fiction from "Jane Eyre." Though both are

excellent in their way, they do not rise to the same level of dramatic power which stamps the first effort of her genius.

What gives success to the novelist to-day is the same as brings audiences to the theatre—sensation. Of this we find traces everywhere, and often it is productive of much harm. There is more sympathy in the less exalted muse than in her graver sister. Comedy comes nearer home than Tragedy. No man expects to meet with Lears or Othellos in ordinary life, but at the corner of the next street he may find himself the hero of a situation such as comedy might prize. And so most of us prefer the mirthful actor, whether we read his doings in the pages of a novel, or smile at them from the stalls of a theatre. And so long as the mirth is harmless, perhaps this is the best. *Dulce est desipere in loco.* Nor do I think that I can conclude this paper better than by quoting a passage from a letter by G. P. R. James, a writer now perhaps too little remembered, in which he discloses his literary aims: —"My object has been to show," he says, "that fiction, without being dry and tedious, may be rendered serviceable to every noble principle; may be taught to convey every generous lesson; and, by interesting our good feelings, instead of our bad feelings, gain over imagination to the side of virtue, and, without crushing our passions, direct them aright."

E. B.

SONNET.

My love lies silent 'neath the darksome yew,
And I live on with beating heart and brain,
And feel my life may not be all in vain
Though he has bid me his last fond adieu.
I neither shall forget nor love again;
But time will draw away the spirit's pain,
As noon-tide glare dries up the morning dew,
When dawn's red tints melt in the zenith's blue.
The morn doth not return, nor doth the glow
Of early passion; but the hours pass by
In storm, it may be, or serenity:
And so my day of life must onward flow,
Till the eve come, and the dew fall once more,
And a new glory flood the western shore.

EMMA RHODES.

THE DIAMOND BRACELET.

By the Author of "EAST LYNNE."

I.

THE stately rooms of one of the finest houses in London were open for the reception of evening guests. Wax lights, looking innumerable when reflected from the mirrors, shed their rays on the gilded decorations, on the fine paintings, and on the gorgeous dresses of the ladies; the enlivening strains of the band invited to the dance, and the rare exotics emitted a sweet perfume. It was the west-end residence of a famed and wealthy city merchant of lofty standing; his young wife was an earl's daughter, and the admission to the house of Mr. and Lady Adela Netherleigh was coveted by the gay world.

"There's a rent!" almost screamed a pretty-looking girl. By some mishap during dancing, her partner contrived to put his foot upon her thin white dress, and the bottom of the skirt was torn half off.

"Quite impossible that I can finish the quadrille," quoth she to him half in amusement, half provoked at the misfortune. "You must find another partner while I go and get this repaired."

It was Lady Frances Chenevix. By some neglect, the lady's-maid was not in attendance up-stairs; and Frances, in her impatience, ran down to the housekeeper's parlour. The sister of Lady Adela, she was quite at home in the house. She had gathered the damaged dress up on her arm, but her white silk petticoat fell in rich folds around her.

"Just look what an object that stupid ——" And there stopped the young lady. For, instead of the housekeeper and lady's-maid, whom she expected to meet, nobody was in the room but a gentleman; a tall, handsome man. She looked thunderstruck: and then slowly advanced and stared at him, as if not believing her own eyes.

"My goodness, Gerard! Well, I should just as soon have expected to meet the dead here."

"How are you, Lady Frances?" he said, holding out his hand with hesitation.

"*Lady* Frances! I am much obliged to you for your formality. Lady Frances returns her thanks to Mr. Hope for his polite inquiries," continued she, in a tone of pique, and honouring him with a swimming curtsey of ceremony.

He caught her hand. "Forgive me, Fanny, but our positions have altered. At least, mine has; and how did I know that you were not altered with it?"

"You are an ungrateful——raven," cried she, "to croak like that. After getting me to write you no end of letters, with all the news about everybody, and beginning 'My dear Gerard,' and ending 'Your affec-

tionate Fanny,' and being as good to you as a sister, you meet me with My Lady Frances!' Now don't squeeze my hand to atoms. What on earth have you come to England for?"

"I could not stop there," he returned, with emotion; "I was fretting away my heartstrings. So I formed a resolution, and I came back. Guess in what way, Frances; and what to do."

"How should I know? To call me 'Lady Frances,' perhaps."

"As a clerk; a clerk, to earn my bread. That's what I am now. Very consistent, is it not, for one in my position to address familiarly Lady Frances Chenevix?"

"You never spoke a grain of sense in your life, Gerard," she exclaimed peevishly. "What do you mean?"

"Mr. Netherleigh has taken me into his counting-house."

"Mr. Netherleigh!" she echoed, in surprise. "What, with that—that ——"

"That crime hanging over me. Speak up, Frances."

"No; I was going to say that doubt. *I* don't believe you guilty: you know that, Gerard."

"I am in his house of business, Frances; and I came up here to-night from the city to bring a note to him from his partner. The reception-rooms were occupied, I suppose, and the servants put me in here. So much the better. I do not care to meet old acquaintances."

"But you had a mountain of debts in England, Gerard, and were afraid of arrest."

"I have managed that: they are going to let me square up by instalments. Has the bracelet never been heard of?"

"Oh! that's gone for good. No doubt melted down in a caldron, as the colonel calls it, and the diamonds reset. It remains a mystery of the past, and is never expected to be solved."

"And they still suspect me! What is the matter with your dress?"

"Matter enough," answered she, letting it down, and turning round for his inspection. "I came here to get it repaired. My great booby of a partner did it for me."

"Fanny, how is Alice Seaton?"

"You have cause to ask after her. She is dying."

"Dying!" repeated Mr. Hope, in a hushed, shocked tone.

"I do not mean actually dying this night, or going to die to-morrow; but that she is dying by slow degrees, there is no doubt. It may be weeks off yet: I cannot tell."

"Where is she?"

"Curious to say, she is where you left her—at Lady Sarah Hope's. Alice could not bear the house after the loss of the bracelet, for she was so obstinate and foolish as to persist that the servants must suspect her, even if Lady Sarah did not. She left; and this spring Lady Sarah saw her, and was so shocked at the change in her, the extent to which she

had wasted away, that she brought her to town by main force, and we and the doctors are trying to nurse her up. It seems of no use."

"Are you also staying at Colonel Hope's again?"

"I invited myself there a week or two ago, to be with Alice. It is pleasanter, too, than being at home."

"I suppose the Hopes are here to-night?"

"My sister is. I do not think your uncle has come yet."

"Does he ever speak of me less resentfully?"

"Not he. I think his storming over it has only made his suspicions stronger. Not a week passes but he begins again about that detestable bracelet. He is unalterably persuaded that you took it, and nobody must dare to put in a word in your defence."

"And does your sister honour me with the same belief?" demanded Mr. Hope, bitterly.

"Lady Sarah is silent on the point to me: I think she scarcely knows what to believe. You see I tell you all freely, Gerard."

Before another word could be spoken, Mr. Netherleigh entered. An aristocratic looking man, with a noble countenance. He bore a sealed note for Mr. Hope to deliver in the city.

"Why, Fanny!" he exclaimed to his sister-in-law, "you here!"

"Yes: look at the sight they have made me," replied she, shaking down her dress for his benefit, as she had previously done for Mr. Hope's. "I am waiting for some of the damsels to mend it for me: I suppose Mr. Hope's presence has scared them away. Won't mamma be in a fit of rage when she sees it, for it is new on to-night."

Gerard Hope shook hands with Lady Frances; and Mr. Netherleigh, who had a word of direction to give him, walked with him into the Hall. As they stood there, who should enter but Colonel Hope, Gerard's uncle. He started back when he saw Gerard.

"C—ca—can I believe my senses?" stuttered he. "Mr. Netherleigh, is *he* one of your guests?"

"He is here on business," was the merchant's reply. "Pass on, colonel."

"No, sir, I will not pass on," cried the enraged colonel, who had not rightly caught the word business. "Or if I do pass on, it will only be to warn your guests to take care of their jewellery. So, sir," he added turning on his nephew, "you can come back, can you, when the proceeds of your theft are spent! You have been starring it in Calais, I hear. How long did the bracelet last you to live upon?"

"Sir," answered Gerard, with a pale face, "it has been starving, rather than starring. I asserted my innocence at the time, Colonel Hope, and I repeat it now."

"Innocence!" ironically repeated the colonel, turning to all sides of the hall, as if he took delight in parading the details of the unfortunate past. "The trinkets were spread out on a table in Lady Sarah's own

house: you came stealthily into it—after having been forbidden it for another fault—went stealthily into the room, and the next minute the diamond bracelet was missing. It was owing to my confounded folly in listening to a parcel of women, that I did not bring you to trial at the time: I have only once regretted not doing it, and that has been ever since. A little wholesome correction at the Penitentiary might have made an honest man of you. Good-night, Mr. Netherleigh: if you encourage him in your house, you don't have me in it."

Now another gentleman had entered and heard this: some servants also heard it. Colonel Hope, who firmly believed in his nephew's guilt, turned off, peppery and indignant; and Gerard, giving vent to sundry unnephew-like expletives, strode after him. The colonel made a dash into a street cab, and Gerard walked towards the city.

Lady Frances Chenevix, her dress all right again, at least to appearance, was waiting to regain breath, after a whirling waltz. Next to her sat a lady who had also been whirling: Frances did not know her.

"You are quite exhausted: we kept it up too long," said the gentleman in attendance on the stranger. "What can I get you?"

"My fan: there it is. Thank you. Nothing else."

"What an old creature to dance herself down!" thought Frances. "She's forty, if she's a day."

The lady opened her fan, and, while using it, the diamonds of her rich bracelet gleamed right in the eyes of Frances Chenevix. Frances looked at it, and started: she strained her eyes and looked at it again: she bent nearer to it, and became agitated with emotion. If her recollection did not play her false, *that was the lost bracelet.*

She discerned her sister, Lady Adela Netherleigh, and glided up to her. "Adela, who is that lady?" she asked, pointing to the stranger.

"I don't know who she is," replied Lady Adela, carelessly. "I did not catch the name. They came with the Cadogans."

"The idea of your having people in your house that you don't know!" indignantly spoke Frances, who was working herself into a fever. "Where's Sarah? do you know that?"

"In the card-room, glued to the whist-table."

Lady Sarah, however, had unglued herself, for Frances only turned from Lady Adela to encounter her. "I do believe your lost bracelet is in the room," she whispered in agitation. "I think I have seen it."

"Impossible!" responded Lady Sarah Hope.

"It looks exactly the same; gold links interspersed with diamonds: and the clasp is the same; three stars. A tall, ugly woman has it on, her black hair strained off her face."

"So very trying a style for plain people!" remarked Lady Sarah, en passant. "Where is she?"

"There: she is standing up now. Let us get close to her. Her dress is that beautiful maize colour with old lace."

Lady Sarah Hope drew near, and obtained a sight of the bracelet The colour flew into her face.

"It is mine, Fanny," she whispered.

But the lady, at that moment, took a gentleman's arm, and moved away. Lady Sarah followed her, with the view of obtaining another look. Frances Chenevix went to Mr. Netherleigh and told him. He showed himself hard of belief.

"You cannot be sure at this distance of time, Fanny. And, besides, more bracelets than one may have been made of that pattern."

"I am so certain that I feel as if I could swear to the bracelet," eagerly replied Lady Frances.

"Hush, hush, Fanny!"

"I recollect it perfectly: the bracelet struck me the moment I saw it. How singular that I should have been talking to Gerard Hope about it this night!"

Mr. Netherleigh smiled. "Imagination is very deceptive, Frances. Your having spoken to Mr. Hope of the bracelet brought it into your thoughts."

"But it could not have brought it to my eyes," returned Frances. "Stuff and nonsense about imagination, Mr. Netherleigh! I am positive it is the bracelet. Here comes Sarah."

"I suppose Frances has been telling you," observed Lady Sarah to her brother-in-law. "I feel convinced it is my own bracelet."

"But—as I have just remarked to Frances—other bracelets may have been made precisely similar to yours," he urged.

"If it is mine, the initials 'S. H.' are scratched on the back of the middle star. I did it one day with a penknife."

"You never mentioned that fact before, Lady Sarah," hastily responded the merchant.

"No. I was determined to give no clue. I was always afraid of the affair being traced home to Gerard, and it would have reflected so much disgrace on my husband's name."

"Did you speak to the lady?—did you ask where she got the bracelet?" interrupted Frances.

How could I?" retorted Lady Sarah. "I do not know her."

"I will," cried Frances, in a resolute tone.

"My dear Frances!" remonstrated Mr. Netherleigh.

"I vow I will," persisted Frances. But they did not believe her.

Lady Frances kept her word. She found the strange lady in the refreshment-room. Locating herself by her side, she entered upon a few trifling remarks, which were civilly received. Suddenly she dashed at once to her subject.

"What a beautiful bracelet!"

"I think it is," was the stranger's reply, holding out her arm for its inspection, without any reservation.

"Where did you buy it?" pursued Frances.

"Garrards are my jewellers."

This very nearly did for Frances: for it was at Garrards' that the colonel originally purchased it: and it seemed to give a colouring to Mr. Netherleigh's view of more bracelets having been made of the same pattern. But she was too anxious and determined to stand upon ceremony—for Gerard's sake: and he was dearer to her than the world suspected.

"We—one of my family—lost a bracelet exactly like this some time back. When I saw it on your arm, I thought it was the same. I hoped it was."

The lady froze directly, and laid down her arm, making no reply.

"Are you—pardon me, there are painful interests involved—are you sure you purchased this at Garrards'?"

"I have said that Messrs. Garrard are my jewellers," replied the stranger, in a repelling voice; and the words sounded evasive to Frances. "More I cannot say: neither am I aware by what law of courtesy you thus question me, nor whom you may be."

The young lady drew herself up, proudly secure in her name and rank. "I am Lady Frances Chenevix."

But the stranger only bowed in silence, and turned to the refreshment table. Frances went to find the Cadogans, and question them.

She was a Lady Livingstone, they told her, wife of a Sir Jasper Livingstone. The husband had made a mint of money at something or other, and been knighted; and now they were launching out into high society.

The nose of Lady Frances went into the air. City knight and his wife! that was it, was it. How could Mrs. Cadogan have taken up with *them?*

The Honourable Mrs. Cadogan did not choose to say: beyond the assertion that they were extremely worthy, good kind of people. She could have said that her spendthrift of a husband had borrowed money from Sir Jasper Livingstone; and to prevent being bothered for it, and keep them in good humour, they introduced the Livingstones where they could.

It seemed that nothing more could be done. Frances Chenevix went home; that is, to Colonel Hope's; and told her strange tale to Alice Seaton, not only about Gerard's being in England, but about the bracelet. Lady Sarah had nearly determined not to move in the matter, for Mr. Netherleigh had infected her with his disbelief, especially since she heard of Lady Livingstone's assertion that Messrs. Garrard were her jewellers. Not so Frances Chenevix. She was determined to follow it up: and next morning, saying evasively that she wanted to call at her father's, she got possession of Lady Sarah's carriage, and down she went to the Haymarket, to Garrards'. Alice Seaton, more fragile than ever, her once lovely countenance so faded now that she looked,

as Frances had said, dying, waited her return in a pitiable state of excitement. Frances came in, looking little less excited.

"Alice, it *is* the bracelet. I am more certain of it than ever. Garrards' people say they have sold articles of jewellery to Lady Livingstone, but not a diamond bracelet. Moreover they say that they never had, of that precise pattern, but the one bracelet Colonel Hope bought."

"What is to be done?" exclaimed Alice.

"I know: I shall go to those Livingstones. Gerard shall not stay under this cloud, if I can help him out of it. Mr. Netherleigh won't act in it; he laughs at me: Lady Sarah won't act; and we dare not tell the Colonel. He is so obstinate and wrong-headed, he would be for arresting Gerard, pending the investigation."

"Frances ——"

"Now don't you preach, Alice. When I will a thing, I *will*: I am like my lady mother for that. Sarah says she scratched her initials inside the bracelet, and I shall demand to see it: if these Livingstones refuse, I'll put the detectives on the scent. I will; as sure as my name is Frances Chenevix."

"And if the investigation should bring the guilt home to—to—Gerard?" whispered Alice, in a hollow tone.

"And if it should bring it home to you! and if it should bring it home to me!" spoke the exasperated Frances. "For shame, Alice; it cannot bring it home to Gerard, for he was never guilty."

Alice Seaton sighed: she saw there was no help for it, for Lady Frances was resolute. "I have a deeper stake in this than you," she said, after a pause of consideration; "let me go to the Livingstones. Yes, Frances, you must not refuse me; I have a very, very urgent motive for wishing it."

"You, you weak mite of a thing! you would faint before you were half through the interview," cried Lady Frances, in a tone between jest and vexation.

Alice persisted. She had indeed a powerful reason for urging it, and Lady Frances conceded the point, though with much grumbling. The carriage was still at the door, for Frances had desired that it should wait, and Alice hastily dressed herself and went down to it, without speaking to Lady Sarah. The footman was closing the door upon her, when out flew Frances.

"Alice, I have made up my mind to go with you; I cannot keep my patience until you are back again. I can sit in the carriage while you go in, you know. Lady Livingstone will be two feet higher from to-day —that the world should have been gladdened with a spectacle of Lady Frances Chenevix waiting humbly at her door."

They drove off. Frances talked incessantly on the road, but Alice was silent: she was deliberating what she should say, and was nerving

herself to the task. Lady Livingstone was at home, and Alice, sending in her card, was conducted to her presence, leaving Lady Frances in the carriage.

Frances had described her as a woman as thin as a whipping-post, with a red nose: and Alice found Lady Livingstone answer to it very well. Sir Jasper, who was also present, was much older than his wife, and short and stout; a good-natured looking man, with a bald head.

Alice, refined and sensitive, scarcely knew how she opened her subject, but she was met in a different manner from what she had expected. The knight and his wife were really worthy people, as Mrs. Cadogan had said: but the latter had a mania for getting into "high life and high-lived company:" a feat she would never thoroughly accomplish. They listened to Alice's tale with courtesy, and at length with interest.

"You will readily conceive the nightmare this has been to me,' panted Alice, for her emotion was great. "The bracelet was under my charge, and it disappeared in this extraordinary way. All the trouble that it has been productive of to me I am not at liberty to tell you, but it has certainly helped to shorten my life."

"You look very ill," observed Lady Livingstone, with sympathy.

"I am worse than I look. I am going into the grave rapidly. Others less sensitive, or with stronger bodily health, might have battled successfully with the distress and annoyance; I could not. I shall die in greater peace if this unhappy affair can be cleared. Should it prove to be the same bracelet, we may be able to trace out how it was lost."

Lady Livingstone left the room and returned with the diamond bracelet. She held it out to Miss Seaton, and the colour rushed into Alice's poor wan face at the gleam of the diamonds: she believed she recognized them.

"But stay," she said, drawing back her hand as she was about to touch it: "do not give it me just yet. If it be the one we lost, the letters S. H. are scratched irregularly on the back of the middle star. Perhaps you will first look if they are there, Lady Livingstone."

Lady Livingstone turned the bracelet, glanced at the spot indicated, and then silently handed it to Sir Jasper. The latter smiled.

"Sure enough here's something on the gold—I can't see distinctly without my glasses. What is it, Lady Livingstone?"

"The letters S. H., as Miss Seaton described: I cannot deny it."

"Deny it! no, my lady, what for should we deny it? If we are in possession of another's bracelet, lost by fraud, and if the discovery will set this young lady's mind at ease, I don't think either you or I shall be the one to deny it. Examine it for yourself, ma'am," added he, giving it to Alice.

She turned it about, she put it on her arm, her eyes lighting with the eagerness of conviction. "It is certainly the same bracelet," she affirmed: "I could be sure of it, I think, without proof, but Lady

Sarah's initials are there, scratched irregularly, just as she describes to have scratched them."

"It is not beyond the range of possibility that initials may have been scratched on this bracelet, without its being the same," observed Lady Livingstone.

"I think it must be the same," mused Sir Jasper. "It looks suspicious."

"Lady Frances Chenevix understood you to say you bought this of Messrs. Garrard," resumed Miss Seaton.

Lady Livingstone felt rather foolish. "What I said was, that Messrs. Garrard were my jewellers. The fact is, I do not know exactly where this was bought: but I did not consider myself called upon to proclaim that fact to a young lady who was a stranger to me, and in answer to questions which I thought were verging on impertinence."

"Her anxiety, scarcely less than my own, may have rendered her abrupt," replied Alice, by way of apology for Frances. "Our hope is not so much to regain the bracelet, as to penetrate the mystery of its disappearance. Can you not let me know where you did buy it?"

"I can," interposed Sir Jasper: "there's no disgrace in having bought it where I did. I got it at a pawnbroker's."

Alice's heart beat violently. A pawnbroker's! What dreaded discovery was at hand?

"I was one day at the east end of London, walking fast, when I saw a topas-and-amethyst cross in a pawnbroker's window," said Sir Jasper. "The thought struck me that it would be a pretty ornament for my wife and I went in to look at it. In talking about jewellery with the master he reached out this diamond bracelet, and told me *that* would be a present worth making. Now, I knew my lady's head had been running on a diamond bracelet; and I was tempted to ask what was the lowest figure he would put it at. He said it was the most valuable article of the sort he had had for a long while, the diamonds of the first water worth four hundred guineas of anybody's money, but that being second hand he could part with it for two hundred and fifty. And I bought it. There's where I got the bracelet, ma'am."

"That was just the money Colonel Hope gave for it new at Garrards'," said Alice. "Two hundred and fifty guineas."

Sir Jasper stared at her: and then broke forth with a comical attempt at rage, for he was one of the best-tempered men in the world.

"The old wretch of a cheat! Sold it to me at second-hand price, as he called it, for the identical sum it cost new! Why, he ought to be prosecuted for usury."

"It is just what I tell you, Sir Jasper," grumbled his lady. "You will go to these low, second-hand dealers, who always cheat where they can, instead of to a regular jeweller; and nine times out of ten you get taken in."

"But your having bought it of this pawnbroker does not bring me any nearer the knowing how he procured it," observed Miss Seaton.

"I shall go to him this very day and ascertain," returned Sir Jasper. "Tradespeople may not sell stolen bracelets with impunity."

Easier said than done. The dealer protested his ignorance and innocence, and declared he had bought it in the regular course of business at one of the pawnbrokers' periodical sales. And the man spoke truth, and the detectives were again applied to.

II.

In an obscure room of a low and dilapidated lodging-house, in a low and dilapidated neighbourhood, there sat a man one evening in the coming twilight: a towering, gaunt skeleton, whose remarkably long arms and legs looked little less than skin and bone. The arms were fully exposed to view, since their owner, though he possessed and wore a waistcoat, dispensed with the use of a shirt. An article, once a coat, lay on the floor, to be donned at will—if it could be got into for the holes. The man sat on the floor in a corner, his head finding a resting-place against the wall, and he had dropped into a light sleep; but if ever famine was depicted in a face, it was in his. Unwashed, unshaven, with matted hair and feverish lips: the cheeks were hollow, the nostrils white and pinched, and the skin round the mouth had a blue tinge. Some one tried, and shook the door; it aroused him, and he started up, but only to cower in a bending attitude and listen.

"I hear you," cried a voice. "How are you to-night, Joe? Open the door."

The voice was not one he knew; consequently not one that might be responded to.

"Do you call this politeness, Joe Nicholls? If you don't open the door I shall take the liberty of opening it for myself: which will put you to the trouble of mending the fastenings afterwards."

"Who are you?" cried Nicholls, reading determination in the voice. "I'm gone to bed, and I can't admit folks to-night."

"Gone to bed at eight o'clock?"

"Yes: I am ill."

"I give you one minute, and then I come in. You will open it if you wish to save trouble."

Nicholls yielded to his fate: and opened the door.

The gentleman—he looked like one—cast his keen eyes round the room. There was not a vestige of furniture in it; nothing but the bare, dirty walls, from which the mortar crumbled, and the bare, dirty boards.

"What did you mean by saying you were gone to bed, eh?"

"So I was. I was asleep there," pointing to the corner, "and that's

my bed. What do you want?" added Nicholls, peering at the stranger's face in the gloom of the evening, but seeing it imperfectly, for his hat was drawn low over it.

"A little talk with you. That last sweepstake you put into ——"

The man lifted his face, and burst forth with such eagerness that the stranger could only arrest his own words, and listen.

"It was a swindle from beginning to end. I had scraped together the ten shillings to put in it; and I drew the right horse, and was shuffled out of the gains, and I have never had my dues; not a farthing of 'em. Since then I've been ill, and I can't get about to better myself. Are you come, sir, to make it right?"

"Some"—the stranger coughed—"friends of mine were in it also," said he: "and they lost their money."

"Everybody lost it; the getters-up bolted with all they had drawn into their fingers. Have they been took, do you know?"

"All in good time; they have left their trail. So you have been ill, have you?"

"Ill! just take a sight at me! There's a arm for a big man."

He stretched out his naked arm for inspection: it appeared as if a touch would snap it. The stranger laid his hand upon its fingers, and his other hand appeared to be stealing furtively towards his own pocket.

"I should say this looks like starvation, Joe."

"Some'at nigh akin to it."

A pause of unsuspicion, and the handcuffs were clapped on the astonished man. He started up with an oath.

"No need to make a noise, Nicholls," said the detective with a careless air. "I have two men waiting outside."

"I swear I wasn't in the plate robbery," passionately uttered the man. "I knew of it but I didn't join 'em, and I never had the worth of as much as a saltspoon, after it was melted down. And they call me a coward, and they leave me here to starve and die! I swear I wasn't in it."

"We'll talk of the plate robbery another time," said the officer, as he raised his hat;" you have got those bracelets on, my man, for another sort of bracelet. A diamond one. Don't you remember me?"

The prisoner's mouth fell. "I thought that was over and done with, all this time—I don't know what you mean," he added, correcting himself.

"No," said the officer, "it is just beginning. The bracelet is found, and has been traced to you. You were a clever fellow, and I had my doubts of you at the time: I thought you were too clever to go on long."

"I should be ashamed to play the sneak, and catch a fellow in this way. Why couldn't you come openly, in your proper clothes? not come playing the spy in the garb of a friendly civilian!"

"My men are in their 'proper clothes,'" was the equable answer, "and you will have the honour of their escort presently. I came because they did not know you, and I did."

"Three officers to take a single man, and he a skeleton!" retorted Nicholls, with a vast show of indignation.

"Ay; but you were powerful once, and ferocious too. The skeleton aspect is a recent one."

"And to be took for nothing! I don't know about any bracelet."

"Don't trouble yourself with inventions, Nicholls. Your friend is safe in our hands, and has made a full confession."

"What friend?" asked Nicholls, too eagerly.

"The lady you got to dispose of it for you to the Jew."

Nicholls was startled to incaution. "She hasn't split, has she?"

"Every particular she knew or guessed at. Split to save herself."

"Then there's no faith in woman."

"There never was yet," returned the officer. "If they are not at the top and bottom of every mischief, Joe, they are sure to be in the middle. 'Is this your coat?' touching it gingerly.

"She's a disgrace to the female sex, she is," raved Nicholls, disregarding the question as to his coat. "But it's a relief, now I'm took; it's a weight off my mind. I was always expecting of it: and I shall get food in the Old Bailey, at any rate."

"Ah," said the officer, "you were in good service as a respectable servant; you had better have stuck to your duties."

"The temptation was so great," observed the man, who had evidently abandoned all idea of denial; and now that he had done so, was ready to be voluble with remembrances and particulars.

"Don't say anything to me," said the officer. "It will be used against you."

"It came all along of my long legs," cried Nicholls, ignoring the friendly injunction, and proceeding to enlarge on the feat he had performed. And it may as well be observed that legs so long as his are rarely seen. "I have never had a happy hour since. I was second footman there, and a good place I had; and I have wished, thousands of times, that the bracelet had been in a sea of fire. Our folks had took a house in the neighbourhood of Ascot for the race week; they had left me at home to take care of the kitchen-maid and another inferior or two, taking the rest of the servants with them. I had to clean the winders before they returned, and I had druv it off till the Thursday evening, when out I got on the balqueny, to begin with the back drawing-room——"

"What do you say you got out on?"

"The balqueny. The thing with the green rails round it, that encloses the winder. While I was leaning over the rails before I began, I heard something like click—click—click going on in the fellow room

next door—which was Colonel Hope's—just as if light articles of some sort were being laid sharp on a table. Presently two voices began to talk, a lady's and a gentleman's, and I listened ——"

"No good ever comes of listening, Joe," interrupted the officer.

"I didn't listen for the sake of listening; but it was awful hot, standing outside there in the sun, and listening was better than working. I didn't want to hear, neither, for I was thinking of my own concerns, and what a fool I was to have idled away my time all day till the sun come on to the back winders. Bit by bit, I heard what they were talking of—that it was jewels they had got there, and that one of 'em was worth two hundred guineas. Thinks I, if that was mine, I'd do no more work. After a while, I heard them go out of the room, and I thought I'd have a look at the rich things, so I stepped over slanting-ways on to the little ledge running along the houses, holding on by our balqueny, and then I passed my hands along the wall till I got hold of their balqueny—but one with ordinary legs and arms couldn't have done it. You couldn't, sir."

"Perhaps not," remarked the officer.

"There wasn't fur to fall, if I had fell, only on to the kitchen leads underneath: leastways not fur enough to kill one, and the leads was flat. But I didn't fall, and I raised myself on to their balqueny, and looked in. My! what a show it was! stunning jewels, all laid out there: so close that if I had put my hand inside, it must have struck all among 'em: and the fiend prompted me to take one. I didn't stop to look, I didn't stop to think: the one that twinkled the brightest and had the most stones in it was the nearest to me, and I clutched it, and slipped it into my footman's undress jacket, and stepped back again."

"And got safe into your balcony?"

"Yes; but I didn't clean the winder that night. I was upset like, by what I had done; and I think, if I could have put it back again, I should; but there was no opportunity. I wrapped it up in my winder-leather, and then in a sheet of brown paper, and then I put it up the chimbley in one of the spare bedrooms. I was up the next morning afore five, and I cleaned my winders: I'd no trouble to awake myself, for I had never slept. The same day, towards evening, you called, sir, and asked me some questions—whether we had seen anyone on the leads at the back, and such like. I said that master was just come home from Ascot, and would you be pleased to speak to him."

"Ah!" again remarked the officer, "you were a clever fellow that day. But if my suspicions had not been strongly directed to another quarter, I might have looked you up more sharply."

"I kep' it by me for a month or two, and then I gave warning to leave. I thought I'd have my fling, and I became acquainted with her —that lady you've just spoke of—and somehow she wormed out of

me that I had got it, and I let her dispose of it for me, for she said she knew how to do it without danger."

"What did you get for it?"

The skeleton shook his head. "Thirty-four pounds, and I had counted on a hundred and fifty. She took her oath she had not helped herself to a sixpence."

"Oaths are plentiful with some ladies," remarked the detective.

"She stood to it she hadn't kept a farthing, and she stopped and helped me to spend the change. After that was done she went over to stop with somebody else who was in luck. And I have tried to go on, and I can't: honestly or dishonestly, it seems all one: nothing prospers and I'm naked and famishing. I wish I was dying."

"Evil courses never do prosper, Nicholls," said the officer, as he called in the policemen, and consigned the gentleman to their care.

So Gerard Hope was innocent!

"But how was it you skilful detectives could not be on this man's scent?" asked Colonel Hope of Mr. Pullet, when he heard the tale.

"Colonel, I was thrown off it. Your positive belief in your nephew's guilt infected me; appearances were certainly very strong against him. Miss Seaton also helped to throw me off: she said, if you remember, that she did not leave the room; but it now appears that she did leave it when your nephew did, though only for a few moments. Those few moments sufficed to do the job."

"It is strange she could not tell the exact truth," growled the colonel.

"She probably thought she was exact enough, since she only remained outside the door, and could answer for it that no one entered by it. She forgot the window. I thought of the window the instant the loss was mentioned to me; but Miss Seaton's assertion, that she never had the window out of her view, prevented my dwelling on it. I did go to the next door, and saw this very fellow who committed the robbery, but his manner was sufficiently satisfactory. He talked too freely: I did not like that; but I found he had been in the same service fifteen months: and, as I must repeat, in my mind the guilt lay with another."

"It is a confoundedly unpleasant affair for me," cried the colonel. "I have published my nephew's disgrace all over London."

"It is more unpleasant for him, colonel," was the rejoinder of the officer.

"And I have kept him short of money, and suffered him to be sued for debt; and I have let him go and live among the runaway scamps over the water, and have not hindered his engaging himself as a merchant's clerk! In short, I have played the very deuce with him."

"But reparation lies, doubtless, in your own heart and hands, colonel."

"I don't know that, sir," testily concluded the colonel.

III.

ONCE more Gerard Hope entered his uncle's house: not as an interloper, stealing into it in secret; but as an honoured guest, to whom reparation was due, and must be made. Alice Seaton leaned back in her invalid chair, a joyous flush on her wasted cheek, a joyous happiness in her eye. Still the shadow of coming death was there, and Mr. Hope was shocked to see her—more shocked and startled than he had expected, or chose to express.

"Oh, Alice! what has done this?"

"That," she answered, pointing to the bracelet, which, returned to its true owner, lay on the table. "I should not have lived many years; of that I am convinced; but I might have been able to live a little longer than I now shall. It has been the cause of misery to many. Lady Sarah says she shall never regard it but as an ill-starred trinket, or wear it with any pleasure."

"But, Alice, why should you have suffered it thus to affect you?" he remonstrated. "You knew your own innocence, and you say you believed and trusted in mine: what did you fear?"

"I will tell you, Gerard," she whispered, a deeper hectic rising to her cheeks. "I could not have confessed my fear, even in dying; it was too distressing, too terrible; but now that it is all clear, I will tell it. *I believed my sister had taken the bracelet.*"

He uttered an exclamation of amazement.

"I have believed it all along. She had called to see me that night, and was, for a minute or two, in the room alone with the bracelets: I knew she, at that time, was short of money, and I feared she had been tempted to take it—just as this unfortunate servant man was tempted. Oh, Gerard! the dread of it has been upon me night and day, preying upon my fears, weighing down my spirits, wearing away my health and my life. And I had to bear it all in silence. It is that enforced, dreadful silence that has killed me."

"Alice, this must have been a morbid fear."

"Not so—if you knew all. But it is at an end, and I am very thankful. I have only one hope now," she added, looking up at him with a sunny smile. Ah, Gerard! can you not guess it?"

"No," he answered, in a stifled voice. "I can only guess that you are lost to me."

"Lost to all here. Have you forgotten our brief conversation, the night you went into exile? I told you then there was one far more worthy of you than I could have ever been."

"None will ever be half so worthy: or—I will say it, Alice, in spite of your warning hand—half so loved."

"Gerard," sinking her voice, "she has waited for you."

"Nonsense," he rejoined.

"She has. When she shall be your wife, you may tell her that I saw it and said it."

"My darling ——"

"Stay, Gerard," she gravely interrupted; "those words of endearment are not for me. Can you deny that you love her?"

"Perhaps I do—in a degree. Next to yourself ——"

"Put me out of your thoughts while we speak. If I were——where I so soon shall be, would she not be dearer to you than anyone on earth? Would you not be well pleased to make her your wife?"

"Yes, I might be."

"That is enough, Gerard. Frances, come hither."

"I thought you were talking secrets," said Lady Frances.

"As we were," answered Alice. "Frances, what can we do to keep him amongst us? Do you know what Colonel Hope has told him?"

"No. What?"

"That though he shall be reinstated in favour as to money matters, he shall not be in his affection or his home, unless he prove sorry for that first rebellion of his. I think Gerard is sorry for it: you must help him to be more so."

"Fanny," said Gerard, while a damask flush mantled in her cheeks, deeper than Alice's hectic, "*will* you help me?"

"As if I could make out head or tail of what you two are discussing!" cried she, as she attempted to turn away; but Gerard caught her to his side.

"Fanny—will you drive me again from the house?"

She lifted her eyes, twinkling with a little spice of mischief. "I did not drive you before."

"In a manner, yes. Do you know what did drive me?"

She had known it at the time: and Gerard read it in her face.

"I see it all," he murmured; "you have been far kinder to me than I deserved. Fanny, let me try and repay you for it."

Alice caught their hands together and held them between her own, with a mental aspiration for their life's future happiness. Some time back she could not have breathed it in so fervent a spirit: but—as she had said—the present world and its hopes were closing to her.

"But you know, Gerard," cried Lady Frances, in a saucy tone, "if you ever do help yourself to somebody's else's bracelet in reality, you must not expect me to go to prison with you."

"Yes I shall," he answered promptly. "A wife must share the fortunes of her husband."

ONLY.

And this is the end of it all ! it rounds the year's completeness :
Only a walk to the stile, through fields afoam with sweetness ;
Only the sunset light, purple and red on the river ;
And a lingering low good-night, that means good-by for ever.

So be it ! and God be with you ! It had been perhaps more kind
Had you sooner (pardon the word) been sure of knowing your mind.
We can bear so much in youth—who cares for a swift sharp pain ?
And the two-edged sword of truth cuts deep, but it leaves no stain !

I shall just go back to my work—to my little household cares,
That never make any show. By times perhaps in my prayers,
I may think of you ! For the rest, on this way we've trodden together.
My foot shall fall as lightly as if my heart were a feather !

And not a woman's heart ! strong to have and to keep,
Patient when children cry, soft to lull them to sleep,
Hiding its secrets close, glad when another's hand
Finds for itself a gem where hers found only sand.

Good-by ! The year has been bright ! As oft as the blossoms come,
The peach with its waxen pink, the waving snow of the plum,
I shall think how I used to watch, so happy to see you pass
I could almost kiss the print of your foot on the dewy grass.

I am not ashamed of my love ! Yet I would not have yours now,
Though you laid it down at my feet. I could not stoop so low.
A love is but half a love that contents itself with less
Than love's utmost faith and truth and unwavering tenderness.

Only this walk to the stile ; this parting word by the river,
That flows so quiet and cold, ebbing and flowing for ever.
"Good-by !" Let me wait to hear the last, last sound of his feet !
Ah me ! but I think in this life of ours the bitter outweighs the sweet.

A. HOPKINS. J. SWAIN.

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1874.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SQUIRE'S TRIBULATION.

WHAT more thankless office is there than to be the bearer of ill news to those we love or regard? Not often in the course of his life had such a duty fallen to the lot of Tom Bristow, and never had the burden seemed so heavy as on this present occasion. He would gladly have given a very fair share of all that he was worth could he but have turned his ill news into good news, or else have imposed upon some one else the telling of those evil tidings of which he was the bearer. From London he had sent a carefully worded telegram to the Squire, which the latter would know how to interpret, hoping thereby to break in some measure the force of the blow which nothing could much longer avert.

When, on his return to Pincote, Tom was ushered into the Squire's room, he found the old man, to all appearance, very much better in health than when he had left him. Mental anxiety had gone a very long way towards curing, for the time being, the physical ills from which he had been suffering. He held out his hand, and gave a long, searching look into Tom's face.

"All gone?" he whispered.

"Yes—all gone," answered Tom.

He gripped Tom's hand very hard. "I did not think it was quite so bad as that," he said. "Not quite. My poor Jenny! My poor little girl! What is to become of her after I'm gone? And Bird, too! The confidence I had in that villain!" He sighed deeply, dropped Tom's hand, and shut his eyes for a few moments, as if in pain.

"You will stay to dinner," he said, presently.

"If you will excuse me to-day——" began Tom.

"But I won't excuse you, sir. Why on earth should I?" he answered, with a flash of his old irritability. "The old house is not good enough for you, I suppose, now you know it holds nothing but paupers."

"Thank you, sir: I will stay to dinner," said Tom, quietly.

"It will be a charity to Jenny, too," added the Squire. "She's been moped up indoors, without a soul to speak to, for I don't know how long. And it's more than a month since she heard from young Cope—his letters must have miscarried, you know—and I'm afraid that's preying on her mind; and so you had better keep her company to-day."

Tom needed no further pressing, we may be sure. He smiled grimly to himself at the idea of Edward Cope's long silence being a matter of distress to Jane. He rose to go.

"Just ring that bell, will you?" said the Squire. "And sit down again for another minute or two. There's something I wanted to say to you, but I can't call to mind what it is just now."

Jane answered the bell in person. She gave Tom her hand in silence, but there was a world of meaning in her eyes as she did so.

"My dear, I wish you would see whether Ridley is anywhere about, and send word that I want to see him. What do you think the villain has done?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, papa."

"Why, he's planted a lot of white hyacinths along with the purple ones in your poor mother's favourite bed opposite the dressing-room window, when he knows very well that I never have any but purple ones there. She never had any but purple ones, and I never will. The scoundrel deserves to be well horsewhipped. I'll discharge him on the spot! I swear I will."

"I will tell him to come and see you," said Jane, calmly. She knew of old that her father's bark was worse than his bite, and that he had no more real intention of discharging Ridley than he had of flying to the moon.

"And now, if you will just give orders to have the basket-carriage brought round, I shall be glad, dear. I feel wonderfully better to-day, and I think a drive would do me good."

"But would Dr. Davidson approve of your going out to-day, papa?"

"Hang Dr. Davidson! I'm not his slave, am I? I tell you that I feel very much better; and, to get out, if only for half an hour, will make me better still."

"Then you will let me go with you?" said Jane.

"Nothing of the kind. I've a great deal to think about while I'm out, and I want to be alone. Besides, I've asked Bristow to stay to dinner, and you must do your best to entertain him."

"If you go out, papa, I shall go with you," said Jane, in her straight-

forward, positive way. "Besides which, Briggs is ill to-day, and there's nobody to drive you—unless you will let Mr. Bristow be your coachman for once, and then we shall all be together."

With some difficulty the Squire was induced to consent to this arrangement. It was evident that he would have preferred to go out alone, but that was just what Jane would by no means allow him to do. Her woman's instinct told her that they were in the midst of a thundercloud, but where and when the lightning would strike she could not even guess. In any case, it seemed to her well that for some time to come her father should be left alone as little as possible.

So they drove out together, all three of them. The Squire was unusually silent, but did not otherwise seem different from his ordinary mood, and neither Tom nor Jane was much inclined for talking. On the road they found a child of six, a little girl who had wandered away from home and lost herself, who was sitting by the roadside crying bitterly. The Squire would have the child on his knee, although she was neither very neatly dressed nor very pretty. He kissed her, and soothed away her tears, and made her laugh, and found out where she lived. Then, in a little while, still sitting on his knee, she fell asleep, and the old man wrapped the thickest rug around her, and sheltered her from the cold as tenderly as though she had been his own child. And when the girl's mother was found, and the girl herself had to be given up, he made her kiss him, and put half-a-crown into her hand, and promised to call and see her in a day or two. Tom, watching him narrowly all the time, said to himself: "I don't understand him at all to-day. I thought my news would have overwhelmed him, but it seems to have had far less effect upon him than it had upon me. I'm fairly puzzled." But there are some troubles so overwhelming that, for a time at least, they numb and deaden the feelings by their very intensity. All the more painful is the after-waking.

"I think, dear, that I will go and lie down for a little while," said the Squire, when they had reached home. "You will wake me up in time for dinner."

But there was Blenkinsop, his steward, waiting by appointment, who wanted his signature to the renewal of a lease.

"Yes, yes, to be sure, Blenkinsop," said the Squire, in his old business-like way, as he sat down at his writing-table and spread out the paper before him and dipped his pen in the ink. Then he paused.

"Just your name, sir, nothing more—on that line," said the steward deferentially, marking the place with his finger.

"Just so, Blenkinsop, just so," said the Squire, tremulously. "But what is my name? Just for the moment I don't seem as if I could recollect it."

A look of horror flashed from Jane's eyes into the eyes of Tom.

She was by her father's side in a moment. He looked helplessly up at her, and tried to smile, but his lips quivered and tears stood in his eyes.

"What is it, dear?" she said, as she stooped and pressed her lips to his forehead.

"I want to sign this lease, and for the life of me I can't recollect my own name."

"Titus Culpepper, dear," she whispered in his ear.

"Of course. What an idiot I must be!" he exclaimed with a laugh, as he dashed off the name in his usual rapid style, and ended with a bigger flourish than usual.

"Won't you go to bed, papa?" said Jane, insinuatingly, as soon as Blenkinsop was gone. "You will rest so much better there, you know."

"Go to bed at this time of day, indeed! What are you thinking about? No, I'll just have a little snooze on the sofa—nothing more. And be sure you wake me up in time for dinner."

In less than two minutes he had gone off to sleep, as calmly and quietly as any little child. Jane rejoined Tom in the drawing-room.

"I am afraid that papa has heard some very bad news, Mr. Bristow," she said.

"Yes, and I was the unfortunate bearer of it," answered Tom.

"He sent you to London the other day to make certain private inquiries for him?"

"He did."

"And the ill news you brought this morning is the result of those inquiries?"

"It is."

There was a pause, which Tom was the first to break. "I think it only right, Miss Culpepper," he said, "that you should be made acquainted with the nature of the business which took me to London. You have no brother, and I know that you have had the practical management of many of your father's affairs for a long time. It is only right that you should know."

"But I would rather not know, Mr. Bristow, if you think that papa would prefer, in the slightest degree, that I should not be told."

"I think it highly desirable that you should be told," said Tom. "No doubt Mr. Culpepper himself will tell you everything before long."

"I am not so sure on that point," interrupted Jane. "As regards his pecuniary affairs, I know little or nothing, although I have long had my suspicions that there was something wrong somewhere."

"In these matters there should be nothing hidden from you—at least not now; and I will take on myself the responsibility of telling you all that I know. Should Mr. Culpepper himself tell you sub-

sequently, there will be no harm done, while you will have had time to think the matter over, and will be better able to advise him as to what might be done under the circumstances. Should he not choose to tell you, I still maintain that it will be better, both for himself and for you, that you should rest in ignorance no longer."

Tom then told her all about his visit to London, its object, and its result.

"Thank heaven that it's nothing more serious than the loss of a few thousand pounds!" said Jane, with an air of relief when Tom had done. "Papa will soon get over that, and we shall be as happy again as ever we have been."

"I am by no means certain that Mr. Culpepper will get over it as easily as you seem to imagine," said Tom, gravely. "I suspect that the entire savings of many years have gone in this crash; and that alone, to a man of your father's time of life, is something very serious indeed."

"Don't think, Mr. Bristow, that I want to make too light of the loss," said Jane, earnestly. "Still, after all, it is nothing but money."

Her spirits had risen wonderfully during the last few minutes, and she could not help showing it. "Dinner will be ready in half an hour," she added. "I will go and see whether papa is awake."

Presently she came back. "He is still fast asleep," she said.

"I think I would not disturb him, if I were you," said Tom. "Sleep, just now, is his best medicine."

As the Squire still slept on, they dined alone, and alone they spent the evening together. They talked of a thousand things, and they seemed to have a thousand more to talk about when the time for parting had come. This evening Tom seemed to care no longer about hiding his feelings. He sat nearer to Jane, he bent more closely over her at the piano; once or twice his lips seemed to touch her hair lightly, but she was not quite sure on the point, and consequently did not care to reprove him. His eyes sought hers more persistently and boldly than they had ever done before, and beneath those ardent glances her own eyes fell, troubled and confused.

When it was time to go, Jane went with him to the door. Said Tom as he stood on the threshold, hat in hand, "Should Mr. Culpepper speak to you about what I have told you this evening, and should he seem at all troubled in his mind about it, will you kindly suggest that he should send for me? It may seem rather conceited on my part to ask you to do this, but as your father has honoured me by taking me into his confidence so far, there can be no harm in my expressing a hope that he will do so still further. It may be in my power to help him through his difficulties, or, at least, through part of them."

"You are very kind," said Jane, with tears in her eyes, as she pressed his hand gratefully.

"And now—good night," said Tom.

Still holding her hand, he looked earnestly into her face. They were standing together just under the hall lamp, and every shade of expression was plainly visible. Her eyes met his for a moment. He read something there—I know not what—that emboldened him. His arm stole round her waist. He pressed her unresisting form to his heart. His lips touched hers for one brief instant. It was the first kiss of love. "Good night, my darling," he whispered; and almost before Jane knew what had befallen her, he was gone.

Her father being still asleep, Jane, all in a sweet confusion, took her work upstairs, and sat down by the dressing-room fire to wait till he should awake. But he still slept on, and by-and-by it grew late, so she sent the servants to bed, and made up her mind to sit by his side till morning. Just then nothing could have been more grateful to her. No thought of sleep would be possible to her for hours to come. She wanted to think over the events of that wonderful evening—to think over them in silence and alone. The time to analyse her feelings had not yet come: she did not care to make the attempt: she only wanted to realize quietly to herself the one sweet blissful fact, that she was loved, and by the one person in the whole world to whom her own heart could be given in return. What happy thoughts nestled round her young heart in the midnight quietude of the old house! "He loves me!" she whispered to herself. But the night wind, listening at the window, caught the syllables and whispered them back, and then rushed gleefully away to tell the trees and the flowers, that began already to feel the warmth of spring in their veins, and the little birds sleeping cosily in their nests beneath the winter moon, and Jane's secret was a secret no longer.

It was nearly three o'clock when the Squire woke up from his long sleep. It was a minute or two before he could collect his thoughts and call to mind all that had happened.

"You are no better than a little simpleton for sitting up," he said gruffly. "As if I couldn't take care of myself when I awoke!" Then he drew her on to his knee and kissed her tenderly. "Get me some bread and cheese and ale," he said. "I'll have supper and breakfast in one."

"Won't you have something different from bread and cheese, papa?" she asked. "There is some game pie and ——"

"No, nothing but bread and cheese," he said, gloomily. "That seems about the only thing I shall be able to afford in time to come."

So Jane went down into the lower part of the house and brought up some bread and cheese and ale; but she brought some game pie also, and when she put a plateful of the latter article before her father, he ate it without a word, and without seeming to know what it was he was eating. He did not speak another word till he had done.

"Jenny, you are a clever girl," he said abruptly, at last, "but do you think you are clever enough to earn your own living?"

Jane laughed. "Your question is rather a strange one," she said. "I will answer it as a woman answers most questions—by asking another. Why do you ask me?"

"Because if I were to die to-morrow, or next month, or next year, that is certainly what you would have to do."

"And I don't doubt my ability to do it," said Jane, with spirit. "Only, papa, you are not going to die either next month, or next year, so that the subject is one which we need not discuss further."

"But it is a subject that must be discussed, and discussed very fully, too. Jane, my girl, you are a pauper, neither more nor less than a pauper!" He spoke in a dry, harsh voice, as if he had made up his mind that his emotion should on no account over-master him.

"Well, papa dear, even if such be the case, I don't suppose that either you or I will love each other any the less on that account."

"That is not the question, girl. It was always one of my dearest hopes to give you fifteen or twenty thousand on your wedding day. In trying to turn that fifteen into fifty thousand, I have lost every penny of it, and in so doing I have altogether ruined your prospects in life."

"I can't see that at all, papa. What you did you did for the best, and if I ever do get married, I hope to marry some one who will love me for myself alone, and not for any money I might take with me."

"Very pretty, and very sentimental," said the Squire, gruffly, "but confounded rubbish for all that. And how hard on young Cope! He will be quite justified in breaking off the engagement."

"What a splendid opportunity Mr. Cope will now have for proving the sincerity of his affection!" said Jane, with a little contemptuous curl of the lip.

"You are talking rank nonsense, Janet. Edward Cope loves you; there's no doubt of that; but his father will never consent to his marrying a beggar, which is just about what you are at the present moment; and Edward has been too well brought up to go in opposition to his father. I confess it will be a great disappointment to me."

"But none to me, papa dear!" cried Jane, impulsively, as she flung her arms round her father's neck and kissed him—"no disappointment to me! Rather let us call it a happy release."

"I don't understand you," said the old man, as he took her by the shoulders and gazed into her face. "I thought you loved Edward Cope as much as he loved you. You don't mean to tell me that I have been mistaken."

"There has been a mistake somewhere, papa," faltered Jane, as she drew one of his arms round her neck, and nestled her head on his shoulder. "I—I almost fancy that it must have been on my side. I allowed myself to drift into an engagement with Mr. Cope almost without

knowing what I was about. I liked Mr. Cope very well, and I thought that I could be happy as his wife, but I have found out my mistake since then. For me to marry Mr. Cope would be to condemn myself to a life of hopeless misery. I could never love him, papa, as a wife ought to love her husband."

"Tut—tut—tut, girl! What romantic rubbish have you got into your head? Cope's a nice young fellow, and when you were his wife you would soon learn to love him well enough, I warrant. All I'm afraid of is that he won't have you for a wife—and all through my fault—all through my fault!"

Jane saw that the present was no time to say more on the point, and wisely held her tongue. For a little while the silence between them was unbroken.

"But I haven't told you the worst yet, Jenny," he said at last.

"Oh! papa."

"Five thousand pounds of your Aunt Fanny's money has been lost in the crash. She had entrusted me with the money to do the best I could for her, and that's the result. She will be at Pincote in less than a week from now, and the first thing she will do, after she has taken off her bonnet and changed her boots, will be to ask me for her money. She will ask me for her money, and what am I to say to her?"

"Good gracious, papa! Aunt Fanny is your own sister, and surely she, of all people in the world, would be the last to trouble you for her money."

"She would be the first," said the Squire, fiercely. "I'd sooner, far sooner, be indebted to the veriest stranger than to her. You don't know your aunt as I know her. I should never hear the last of it. I should have no peace of my life. Day and night my turpitude—my vile criminality, as she would call it—would be dinned into my ears, till I should be driven half crazy. And not only that: your aunt Fanny is a woman who can never keep a secret. To one confidential friend after another the whole affair would be whispered, with sundry embellishments of her own, till at last the whole country side would know of it, and I could never hold up my head in society again."

"As I understand the case, papa, you want to raise five thousand pounds within the next few days?"

"That is precisely what I want."

"Then why not ask Mr. Cope? Surely he would not refuse to lend it to you."

"I am not so sure about that," said Mr. Culpepper, drily. "Cope has not been like the same man to me of late that he used to be. The old ship is beginning to leak, and the rats are deserting it. I suppose I shall be compelled to ask him, but I would almost sooner lose my right hand than do it."

"There's Mr. Bristow," suggested Jane, timidly. "Why not speak

to him? He might, perhaps, find some means of helping you out of your difficulty."

"How can a man that's not worth five thousand pence be of any use to a man who wants five thousand pounds?" asked the Squire, contemptuously. "No, no; Bristow's all very well in his way. A decent, good-natured young fellow, with all his wits about him, but of no use whatever at a crisis like the present."

"Is there not such a thing as a mortgage?" asked Jane. "Could you not raise some money on the estate?"

"When my father lay on his deathbed," said the Squire, gravely, "he made me take a solemn oath that I would never raise a penny by mortgage on the estate, and I would rather suffer anything and everything than break that promise. But it's high time we were both in bed. You look worn-out for want of sleep, and I don't feel over bright myself. Kiss me, dearie, and let us say good night, or rather good morning. We must hope for the best, and at present that seems the only thing we can do."

The following post brought a letter from Mrs. McDermot. After mentioning on what day and by what train she might be expected to arrive, she wrote: "You won't forget the five thousand pounds, brother. I have bought some house property, and want to remit the money immediately on my arrival. I suppose it would not be reasonable to expect more than five per cent. interest on the amount?" The Squire tossed the letter across the table to Jane without a word.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A WAY OUT OF THE DIFFICULTY.

Two hours after the receipt of Mrs. McDermot's second letter, Squire Culpepper was on his way to Sugden's bank. His heart was heavy, and his step slow. He had never had to borrow a farthing from any man—at least, never since he had come into the estate—and he felt the humiliation, as he himself called it, very bitterly. There was something of bitterness, too, in having to confess to his friend Cope how all his brilliant castles in the air had vanished utterly, leaving not a wrack behind. He could see, in imagination, the sneer that would creep over Cope's face as the latter asked him why he could not obtain a mortgage on his fine new mansion at Pincote; the mansion he had talked so much about—about which he had bored his friends; the mansion that was to have been built out of the Alcazar shares, but of which not even the foundation-stone would ever now be laid. Then, again, the Squire was far from certain as to the kind of reception which would be accorded him by the banker. Of late he had seemed cool, very cool—refrigerating almost. Once or twice, too, when he had called, Mr.

Cope had been invisible: a Jupiter Tonans buried for the time being among a cloud of ledgers and dockets and transfers: not to be seen by any one save his own immediate satellites. The time had been, and not so very long ago, when he could walk unchallenged through the outer bank office, whoever else might be waiting, and so into the inner sanctum, and be sure of a welcome when he got there. But now he was sure to be intercepted by one or other of the clerks with a "Will you please to take a seat for a moment while I see whether Mr. Cope is disengaged." The Squire groaned with inward rage as, leaning on his thick stick, he limped down Duxley High Street and thought of all these things.

As he had surmised it would be, so it was on the present occasion. He had to sit down in the outer office, one of a row of six who were waiting Mr. Cope's time and pleasure to see them. "He won't lend me the money," said the Squire to himself, as he sat there choking with secret mortification. "He'll find some paltry excuse for refusing me. It's almost worth a man's while to tumble into trouble just to find out who are his friends and who are not."

However, the banker did not keep him waiting more than five or six minutes. "Mr. Cope will see you, sir," said a liveried messenger, who came up to him with a low bow; and into Mr. Cope's parlour the Squire was thereupon ushered.

The two men met with a certain amount of restraint on either side. They shook hands as a matter of course, and made a few remarks about the weather; and then the banker began to play with his seals, and waited in bland silence to hear whatever the Squire might have to say to him.

Mr. Culpepper fidgetted in his chair and cleared his throat. The crucial moment was come at last. "I'm in a bit of a difficulty, Cope," he began, "and I've come to you, as one of the oldest friends I have, to see whether you can help me out of it."

"I should have thought that Mr. Culpepper was one of the last people in the world to be troubled with difficulties of any kind," said the banker, in a tone of studied coldness.

"Which shows how little you know about either Mr. Culpepper or his affairs," said the Squire, drily.

The banker coughed dubiously. "In what way can I be of service to you?" he said.

"I want five thousand five hundred pounds by this day week, and I've come to you to help me to raise it."

"In other words, you want to borrow five thousand five hundred pounds?"

"Exactly so."

"And what kind of security are you prepared to offer for a loan of such magnitude?"

"What security! Why, my I.O.U., of course."

Mr. Cope took a pinch of snuff slowly and deliberately before he spoke again. "I am afraid the document in question could hardly be looked upon as a negotiable security."

"And who the deuce wanted it to be considered as a negotiable security?" burst out the Squire. "Do you think I want everybody to know my private affairs?"

"Possibly not," said the banker, quietly. "But, in transactions of this nature, it is a matter of simple business that the person who advances the money should have some equivalent security in return."

"And is not my I.O.U. a good and equivalent security as between friend and friend?"

"Oh! if you are going to put the case in that way, it becomes a different kind of transaction entirely," said the banker.

"And how else did you think I was going to put the case, as you call it?" asked the Squire, indignantly.

"Commercially, of course: as a pure matter of business between one man and another."

"Oh, ho! that's it, is it?" said the Squire, grimly.

"That's just it, Mr. Culpepper."

"Then friendship in such a case as this counts for nothing, and my I.O.U. might just as well never be written."

"Let us be candid with each other," said the banker, blandly. "You want the loan of a very considerable sum of money. Now, however much inclined I might be to lend you the amount out of my own private coffers, you will believe me when I say that I am not in a position to do so. I have no such amount of available capital in hand at present. But if you were to come to me with a good negotiable security, I could at once put you into the proper channel for obtaining what you want. A mortgage, for instance. What could be better than that? The estate, so far as I know, is unencumbered, and the sum you need could easily be raised on it on very easy terms."

"I took an oath to my father on his death-bed that I would never raise a penny by mortgage on Pincote, and I never will."

"If that is the case," said the banker, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, "I am afraid that I hardly see in what way I can be of service to you." He coughed, and then he looked at his watch, an action which Mr. Culpepper did not fail to note and resent in his own mind.

"I am sorry I came," he said, bitterly. "It seems to have been only a waste of your time and mine."

"Don't speak of it," said the banker, with his little business laugh. "In any case, you have learned one of the first and simplest lessons of commercial ethics."

"I have indeed," answered the Squire, with a sigh. He rose to go.

"And Miss Culpepper, is she quite well?" said Mr. Cope, rising

also. "I have not had the pleasure of seeing her for some little time."

The Squire faced fiercely round. "Look you here, Horatio Cope," he said; "you and I have been friends of many years' standing. Fast friends, I thought, whom no reverses of fortune would have separated. Finding myself in a little strait, I come to you for assistance. To whom else should I apply? It is idle to say that you could not help me out of my difficulty, were you willing to do so."

"No, believe me ——" interrupted the banker; but Mr. Culpepper went on without deigning to notice the interruption.

"You have not chosen to do so, and there's an end of the matter, so far. Our friendship must cease from this day. You will not be sorry that it is so. The insults and slights you have put upon me of late have all had that end in view, and you are doubtless grateful that they have had the desired effect."

"You judge me very hardly," said the banker.

"I judge you from your own actions, and from them alone," said the Squire, sternly. "Another point, and I have done. Your son was engaged to my daughter, with your full sanction and consent. That engagement, too, must come to an end."

"With all my heart," said the banker, quietly.

"For some time past your son, acting, no doubt, on instructions from his father, has been gradually paving the way for something of this kind. There have been no letters from him for five weeks, and the last three or four that he sent were not more than as many lines each. No doubt he will feel grateful at being released from an engagement that had become odious to him; and on Miss Culpepper's side the release will be an equally happy one. She had learned long ago to estimate at his true value the man to whom she had so rashly pledged her hand. She had found out, to her bitter cost, that she had promised herself to a person who had neither the instincts nor the education of a gentleman—to an individual, in fact, who was little better than a common boor."

This last thrust touched the banker to the quick. His face flushed deeply. He crossed the room and called down an india-rubber tube: "What is the amount of Mr. Culpepper's balance?"

Presently came the answer: "Two eighty eleven five."

"Two hundred and eighty pounds, eleven shillings, and five pence," said Mr. Cope, with a sneer. "May I ask, sir, that you will take immediate steps for having this magnificent balance transferred to some other establishment?"

"I shall take my own time about doing that," said Mr. Culpepper.

"What a pity that your new mansion was not finished in time—quite a castle it was to have been, was it not? A mortgage of five or six

thousand could have been a matter of no difficulty then, you know. If I recollect rightly, all the furniture and decorations were to have come from London. Nothing in Duxley would have been good enough. I merely echo your own words."

The Squire winced. "I am rightly served," he muttered to himself. "What can one expect from a man who swept out an office and cleaned his master's shoes?" He rose to go. For all his bitterness, there was a little pathetic feeling at work in his heart. "So ends a friendship of twenty years," was his thought. "Good-bye, Cope," he said aloud as he moved towards the door.

The banker, standing with his back to the fire, and looking straight at the opposite wall, neither stirred nor spoke, nor so much as turned his head to take a last look at his old friend. And so, without another word, the Squire passed out.

A bleak north wind was blowing as the Squire stepped into the street. He paused for a moment to button his coat more closely around him. As he did so, a poor ragged wretch passed trembling by without saying a word. The Squire called the man back and gave him a shilling. "My plight may be bad enough, but his is a thousand times worse," he said to himself as he walked down the street.

Where to go, or what to do next, he did not know. He had gone to see Mr. Cope without any very great expectation of being able to obtain what he wanted, and yet, perhaps, not without some faint hope nestling at his heart that his friend would find him the money. But now he knew for a fact that nothing was to be got from that quarter, he felt a little chilled, a little lonely, a little lost as to what he should do next. That something must be done, he knew quite well, but he was at a nonplus as to what that something ought to be. To raise five thousand five hundred pounds at a few days' notice, with no better security to offer than a simple I.O.U., was by no means an easy matter, as the Squire was beginning to discover to his cost. "Why not ask Sir Harry Cripps?" he said to himself. But then he bethought himself that Sir Harry had a very expensive family, and that only six months ago he had given up his hunter, and dispensed with a couple of carriage-horses, and had talked of going on to the Continent for four or five years. No: it was evident that Sir Harry Cripps could do nothing for him.

In what other direction to turn he knew not. "If poor Lionel Dering had only been alive, I could have gone to him with confidence," he thought. "Why not try Kester St. George?" was his next thought. "No: Kester isn't one of the lending kind," he muttered, with a shake of the head. "He's uncommonly close-fisted, is Kester. What he's got he'll stick to. No use trying there."

Next moment he nearly ran against General St. George, who was coming from an opposite direction. They started at sight of each

other, then shook hands cordially. Their acquaintanceship dated only from the arrival of the General at Park Newton, but they had already learned to like and esteem one another.

After the customary greetings and inquiries were over, said Mr. Culpepper to the General: "Is your nephew Kester still stopping with you at Park Newton?"

"Yes, he is still there," answered the General; "though he has talked every day for the last month or more about going. Kester is one of those unaccountable fellows that you can never depend on. He may stay for another month, or he may take it into his head to go by the first train to-morrow."

"I heard a little while ago that he was ill. But I suppose he is better again by this time?"

"Yes—quite recovered. He was laid up for three or four days, but he soon got all right again."

"Your other nephew—George—Tom—Harry—what's his name—is he quite well?"

"You mean Richard—he who came from India. Yes, he is quite well."

"He's very like his poor brother, only darker and—pardon me for saying so—not half so agreeable a young fellow."

"Everybody seems to have liked poor Lionel."

"Nobody could help liking him," said the Squire, with energy. "I felt the loss of that poor boy almost as much as if he had been my own son."

"Not a soul in the world had an ill word to say about him."

"I wish that the same could be said of all of us," said the Squire. And so, after a few more words, they parted.

As General St. George had told the Squire, Kester was still at Park Newton. The doctor who was called in to attend him after his sudden attack on the night that the footsteps were heard in the nailed-up room, prescribed a bottle or two of some harmless mixture, and a few days of complete rest and isolation. As Kester would neither allow himself to be examined, nor answer any questions, there was very little more that could be done for him.

Kester's first impulse after his recovery—and a very strong impulse it was—was to quit Park Newton at once and for ever. Further reflection, however, convinced him that such a step would be unwise in the extreme. It would at once be said that he had been frightened away by the ghost, and that was a thing that he could by no means afford to have said of him. For it to get gossiped about that he had been driven from his own house by the ghost of Percy Osmond might, in time, tend to breed suspicion; and from suspicion might spring inquiry, and that might ultimately lead to nobody knew what. No: he would stay on at Park Newton for weeks—for months even, if it suited him to do so.

The incident of his sudden illness was a very untoward one : on that point there could be no doubt whatever : but not if he could anyhow help it should the faintest breath of suspicion spring therefrom.

The Squire's troubles had faded into the background for a few minutes during his interview with General St. George, but they now rushed back upon him with, as it seemed, tenfold force. There was nothing left for him now but to go home, and yet he had never felt less inclined to do so in his life. He dreaded the long quiet evening, with no society but that of his daughter. Not that Jane was a dull companion, or anything like it ; but he dreaded to encounter her pleading eyes, her pretty caressing ways, the lingering embrace she would give him when he entered the house, and her good-night kiss. He felt how all these things would tend to unman him, how they would merely serve to deepen the remorse which he felt already. If only he could meet with someone to take home with him !—he did not care much who it was—someone who would talk to him, and enliven the evening, and take off for a little while the edge of his trouble, and so help him to tide over the weary hours that intervened between now and the morrow. By which time something might happen—he knew not what—or some light be vouchsafed to him which would show him a way out of his difficulties.

These, or something like these, were the thoughts that were floating hazily in his mind, when in the distance he spied Tom Bristow striding along at his usual energetic rate. The Squire being still very lame, wisely captured a passing butcher boy, and, with the promise of sixpence, bade him hurry after Tom, and not come back without him.

"You must come back with me to Pincote," he said, when the astonished Tom had been duly captured. "I'll take no refusal. I've got a fit of mopes, and if you don't come and help to keep Jenny and me alive this evening, I'll never speak to you again as long as I live." So saying, the Squire linked his arm in Tom's, and turned his face towards Pincote ; and nothing loth was Tom to go with him.

"I've done a fine thing this afternoon," said Mr. Culpepper, as they drove along in the basket-carriage, which had been waiting for him at the hotel. "I've broken off Jenny's engagement with Edward Cope."

Tom's heart gave a great bound. "Pardon me, sir, for saying so," he said as calmly as he could, "but I never thought that Mr. Cope was in any way worthy of Miss Culpepper."

"You are right, boy. He was not worthy of her."

"From the first time of seeing them together, I felt how entirely unfitted was Mr. Cope to appreciate Miss Culpepper's manifold charms of heart and mind. A marriage between two such people would have been a most incongruous one."

"Thank Heaven ! it's broken now and for ever."

"I've broken off your engagement to Edward Cope," whispered the Squire to Jane in the hall, as he kissed her. "Are you glad or sorry dear?"

"Glad—very, very glad, papa," she whispered back as she rained a score of kisses on his face. Then she began to cry, and with that she ran away to her own room till she could recover herself.

"Women are queer cattle," said the Squire, turning to Tom, "and I'll be hanged if I can ever make them out."

"From Miss Culpepper's manner, sir," said Tom, gravely, "I should judge that you had told her something that pleased her very much indeed."

"Then what did she begin snivelling for?" said the Squire, gruffly.

"Why not tell him everything?" said the Squire to himself, as he and Tom sat down in the drawing-room. "He knows a good deal already—why not tell him more? I know he can do nothing towards helping me to raise five thousand pounds, but it will do me good to talk to him. I must talk to somebody—and I feel sure my secret is quite safe with him. I'll tell him while Jenny's out of the room."

The Squire coughed and hemmed, and poked the fire violently before he could find a word to say. "Bristow," he burst out at last, "I want to raise five thousand-five hundred pounds in five days from now, and as I'm rather a bad hand at borrowing, I thought that you could, maybe, give me a hint as to how it could best be done. Cope would have advanced it for me in a moment, only that he happens to be rather short of funds just now, and I don't want to trouble any of my other friends if it can anyhow be managed without." He began to hum the air of an old drinking-song, and poked the fire again. "Capital coals these," he added. "And I got 'em cheap, too. The market went up three shillings a ton the very day after these were sent in."

"Five thousand five hundred pounds is rather a large amount, sir," said Tom, slowly.

"Of course it's a large amount," said the Squire, testily. "If it were only a paltry hundred or two I wouldn't trouble anybody. But never mind, Bristow—never mind. I didn't suppose that you could help me when I mentioned it; and, after all, it's a matter of very little consequence whether I raise the money or not."

"I can only suggest one way, sir, by which the money could be raised in so short a time."

"Eh!" said the Squire, turning suddenly on him, and dropping the poker noisily in the grate. "You don't mean to say that you can see how it's to be done!"

"I think I do, sir. Do you know the piece of ground called Prior's Croft?"

"Very well indeed. It belongs to Duckworth, the publican."

"Between you and me, sir, Duckworth's hard up, and would be glad

to sell the Croft if he could do it quietly and without its becoming generally known that he is short of money."

"Well?" said the Squire, a little impatiently. He could not understand what Tom was driving at.

"I dare engage to say, sir, that you could have the Croft for two thousand pounds, cash down."

"Confound it, man, what an idiot you must be!" said the Squire fiercely, bringing his fist down on the table with a tremendous bang. "Didn't I tell you that I wanted to borrow money, and not to spend it? In fact, as you know quite well, I've got none to spend."

"Precisely so," said Tom, coolly. "And that is the point to which I am coming, if you will hear me out."

The Squire's only answer was to glare at him as if in doubt whether he had not taken leave of his senses.

"As I said before, sir, Duckworth will take two thousand pounds for the Croft, cash down. Now I, sir, will engage to raise two thousand pounds for you by to-morrow at noon, with which to buy the piece of ground in question. The purchase can be effected, and the necessary deeds made out and completed, by ten o'clock the following morning. If you will entrust those deeds into my possession, I will guarantee to effect a mortgage for six thousand pounds, in your name, on the Croft."

If the Squire had looked suspicious with regard to Tom's sanity before, he now seemed to have no doubt whatever on the point. He quietly took up the poker again, as if he were afraid that Tom might spring at him unexpectedly.

"So you could lend me two thousand pounds, could you?" said the Squire, drily.

"I did not say that, sir. I said that I could raise two thousand pounds for you, which is a very different matter from lending it out of my own pocket."

"Humph! And who, sir, do you think would be such a consummate ass as to advance six thousand pounds on a plot of ground that had just been bought for two thousand?"

"Strange as such a transaction may seem to you, sir, I give you my word of honour that I should find no difficulty in carrying it out. Have I your permission to do so?"

"I suppose that the two thousand raised by you would have to be repaid out of the six thousand raised by mortgage, leaving me with a balance of four thousand in hand?" said the Squire, without heeding Tom's question, a smile of incredulity playing round his mouth.

"No, sir," answered Tom. "The two thousand pounds could remain on interest at five per cent. for whatever term might suit your convenience. Again, sir, I ask, have I your permission to negotiate the transaction for you?"

Mr. Culpepper gazed steadily for a moment or two into Tom's clear,

cold eyes. There were no symptoms of insanity visible there, at any rate. "And do you mean to tell me in sober seriousness," he said, "that you can raise this money in the way you speak of?"

"In sober seriousness, I mean to tell you that I can. Try me."

"I will try you," answered the Squire, impulsively. "I will try you, boy. You are a strange fellow, and I begin to think that there's more in you than I ever thought there was. But here comes Jenny. Not a word more just now."

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE SYCAMORE WALK.

THE Park Newton clocks, with more or less unanimity as to time, had just struck ten. It was a February night, clear and frosty, and Lionel Dering sat in his dressing-room in slippered ease, musing by firelight. He had turned out the lamp on purpose; it was too garish for his mood to-night. He was back again in thought at Gatehouse Farm. Again he saw the grey old cottage, with its moss-grown eaves—the cottage that was so ugly outside, but so cosy within. Again he saw the long low sand-hills, where they stretched themselves out to meet the horizon, and, in fancy, heard again the low, monotonous plash of the waves, whose melancholy music, heard by day and night, had at one time been as familiar to him as the sound of his own voice. What a quiet, happy time that seemed as he now looked back to it—a time of soft shadows and mild sunshine, with a pensive charm that was all its own, and that was lost for ever in the hour which told him that he was a rich man! Riches! What had riches done for him? He groaned in spirit as he asked himself the question. He could have been happy with Edith in a garret—how happy none but himself could have told—had fortune compelled him to earn her bread and his own by the sweat of his strong right arm.

His musings were interrupted by a knock at the door. "Come in," he called out mechanically; and in there came, almost without a sound, Dobbs, body-servant to Kester St. George.

"Oh, Dobbs, is that you?" said Lionel, a little wearily, as he turned his head and saw who it was.

"Yes, sir, I have made bold to intrude upon you for a few seconds," said Dobbs, with the utmost deference, as he slowly advanced into the room, rubbing the long lean fingers of one hand softly with the palm of the other. "My master has not yet got back from Duxley, and there's nobody about just now."

"Quite right, Dobbs," said Lionel. "Anything fresh to report?"

"Nothing particularly fresh, sir, but I thought that you might perhaps like to see me."

"Very considerate of you, Dobbs, but I am not aware that I have anything of consequence to say to you to-night."

"Thank you, sir," said Dobbs, with a faint smile and an extra rub of his fingers. "Master's still very queer, sir. No appetite worth speaking about. Obliged to screw himself up with brandy in a morning before he can finish his toilet. Mutters and moans a good deal in his sleep, sir."

"Mutters in his sleep, does he?" said Lionel. "Have you any idea, Dobbs, what it is that he talks about?"

"I have tried my best to ascertain, sir, but without much success. I have listened and listened for hours, and very cold work it is, sir; but there's never more than a word now and a word then that one can make out. Nothing connected—nothing worth recollecting."

"Does Mr. St. George still walk in his sleep?"

"He does, sir, but not very often—not more than two or three times a month."

"Keep your eyes open, Dobbs, and the very next time your master walks in his sleep come to me at once—never mind what hour it may be—and tell me."

"I won't fail to do so, sir."

"In these sleep-walking rambles does Mr. St. George always confine himself to the house, or does he ever venture out into the park or grounds?"

"He generally goes out of doors, sir, at such times. Three times out of four he goes as far as the Wizard's Fountain in the Sycamore Walk, stops there for a minute or two, and then walks back home. I have watched him several times."

"The Wizard's Fountain, in the Sycamore Walk! What should take him there?"

"Then you know the place, sir?"

"I know it well."

"Can't say what fancy takes him there, sir. Perhaps he doesn't know hisself."

"In any case, let me know when he next walks in his sleep. I have no further instructions for you to-night, Dobbs."

"Thank you, sir. I have the honour to wish you a very good night, sir."

"Good night, Dobbs. Keep your eyes open, and report everything to me."

"Yes, sir, yes. You may trust me for doing that, sir." And Dobbs the obsequious bowed himself out.

In his cousin's valet Lionel had found an instrument ready to his hand, but it was not till after long hesitation and doubt that he made up his mind to avail himself of it. The necessities of the case at length decided him to do so. No one appreciated the value of a bribe

better than Dobbs, or worked harder or more conscientiously to deserve one. There was a crooked element in his character which made whatever money he might earn by indirect means, or by tortuous working, seem far sweeter to him than the honest wages of every-day life. Kester St. George was not the kind of man ever to try to attach his inferiors to himself by any tie of gratitude or kindness. At different times and in various ways he suffered for this indifference, although the present could hardly be considered as a case in point, seeing that it was not in the nature of Dobbs to resist a bribe in whatever shape it might offer itself, and that gratitude was one of those virtues which had altogether been omitted from his composition.

Late one afternoon, a few days after the interview between Lionel and Dobbs, Kester St. George had his horse brought round, and rode out unattended, and without leaving word in what direction he was going, or at what hour he might be expected back. The day was dull and lowering, with fitful puffs of wind, that blew first from one point and then from another, and seemed the forerunners of a coming storm. Buried in his own thoughts, Kester paid no heed to the weather, but rode quickly forward till several miles of country had been crossed. By and by he diverged from the main road, and turned his horse's head into a tortuous and muddy lane, which, after half an hour's bad travelling, landed him on the verge of a wide stretch of brown, treeless moor, than which no place could well have looked more desolate and cheerless under the grey monotony of the darkening February afternoon. Kester halted for awhile at the end of the lane to give his horse breathing time. Far as the eye could see, looking forward from the point where he was standing, all was bare and treeless, without one single sign of habitation or life.

"Whatever else may be changed, either with me or the world," he muttered, "the old moor remains just as it was the first day that I can remember it. It was horrible to me at first, but I learned to like it—to love it even, before I left it; and I love it now—to-day—with all its dreariness and monotony. It is like the face of an old friend. You may go away for twenty years, and when you come back you know that you will find on it just the same look that it wore when you went away. Not that I have ever cared to cultivate such friendships," he added, half regretfully. "Well, the next best thing to having a good friend is to have a good enemy, and I can thank heaven for granting me several such."

He touched his horse with the spur, and rode slowly forward, taking a narrow bridle-path that led in an oblique direction across the moor. "This ought to be the road, if my memory serves me aright," he muttered, "but they are all so much alike, and intersect each other so frequently, that it's far more easy to lose one's way than to know where one is."

"I suppose I shall have the rough side of Mother Mim's tongue when I do find her," he went on. "I've neglected her shamefully, without a doubt. But such ties as the one between her and me become tiresome in the long run. She ought to have died off long ago, but she's as tough as leather. Poor devils in this part of the country, that haven't a penny to bless themselves with, think nothing of living till they're a hundred. Is it a surplus of ozone, or a want of brains, that keeps them alive so long?"

He rode steadily forward till he had nearly crossed one angle of the moor. At length, but not without some difficulty, he found the place he had come in search of. It was a rudely-built hut—cottage it could hardly be called—composed of mud, and turf, and great boulders all unhewn. Its roof of coarsest thatch was frayed and worn with the wind and rain of many winters. Its solitary door of old planks, roughly nailed together, opened full on to the moor.

At the back was a patch of garden-ground, which was supposed to grow potatoes in the season, but which had never yet been known to grow any that were fit to eat. Mr. St. George looked round with a sneer as he dismounted.

"And it was in this wretched den that I spent the first eight years of my existence!" he muttered. "And the woman whom this place calls its mistress was the first being whom I learned to love! And, faith, I'm rather doubtful whether I've ever loved anybody half so well since."

Putting his horse's bridle over a convenient hook, and dispensing with the ceremony of knocking, Kester St. George lifted the latch, pushed open the door, stooped his head, and went in. Inside the hut everything was in semi-darkness, and Kester stood for a minute with the door in his hand, striving to make out the objects before him.

"Come in and shut the door: I expected you," said a hollow voice from one corner of the room; and the one room, such as it was, comprised the whole hut.

"Is that you, Mother Mim?" asked Kester.

"Aye—who else should it be?" answered the voice. "But come in and shut the door. That cold wind gives me the shivers."

Kester did as he was told, and then made his way to a wretched pallet at the other end of the hut. Of furniture there was hardly any, and the aspect of the whole place was miserable in the extreme. Over the ashes of a wood fire crouched a girl of sixteen, ragged and unkempt, who stared at him with black, glittering eyes as he passed her. Next moment he was standing by the side of a ragged pallet, on which lay the figure of a woman who looked ill almost unto death.

"Why, mother, whatever has been the matter with you?" asked Kester. "A little bit out of sorts, eh? But you'll soon be all right again now."

"Yes, I shall soon be all right now—soon be quite well," answered the woman grimly. "A black box and six feet of earth cure everything."

"You mustn't talk in that way, mother," said Kester, as he sat down on the only chair in the place, and took one of the woman's lean, hot hands in his. "You will live to plague us for many a year to come."

"Kester St. George, this is the last time you and I will meet in this world."

"I hope not, with all my heart," said Kester, feelingly.

"I know what I know, and I know that what I say is true," answered Mother Mim. "You would not have come now if I had not worked a spell strong enough to bring you here even against your will. I worked it four nights ago, at midnight, when that young viper there"—pointing a finger at the girl, who was still cowering over the ashes—"was fast asleep, and there were no eyes to see but those of the cold stars. Ah! but it was horrible! and if it had not been that I felt I must see you before I died, I could never have gone through with it." She paused for a moment, as though overcome by some dreadful recollection. "Then, when it was over, I crept back to bed, and waited quietly, knowing that now you could not choose but come."

"I ought to have come and seen you long ago—I know it—I feel it," said Kester. "But let bygones be bygones, and I give you my solemn promise never to neglect you again. I am rich now, mother, and you shall never want for anything as long as you live."

"Too late—too late!" sighed the woman. "Yes, you're rich now, rich enough to bury me, and that's all I ask you to do."

"Don't talk like that, mother," said Kester.

"If you had only come to see me!" said the woman. "That was all I wanted. Just to see your face, and squeeze your hand, and have you talk to me for a little while. I wanted none of your money—no, not a single shilling of it. It was only you I wanted."

Kester began to feel slightly bored. He squeezed Mother Mim's hand, and then dropped it, but he did not speak.

"But you didn't come," moaned the woman, "and you wouldn't have come now if I hadn't worked a charm to bring you."

"There you wrong me," said Kester, decisively. "Your charm, or spell, or whatever it may have been, had no effect in bringing me here. I came of my own free will."

"Self-conceited, as you always were and always will be," muttered the woman. Then, half raising herself in bed, and addressing the girl, she cried: "Nell, you hussy, just you hook it for a quarter of an hour. The gent and I have something to talk about."

The girl rose sullenly, went slowly out, and banged the door behind her.

Kester wondered what was coming next. He had dropped the woman's hand, but she now held it out for him to take again. He took it, and she pressed his hand passionately to her lips three or four times.

"If the great secret of my life is to be told at all on this side the grave, the time to tell it is now come. I always thought to die without revealing it, but somehow of late everything has seemed different to me, and I feel now as if I couldn't die easy without telling you." She paused for a minute, exhausted. There was some brandy on the chimney-piece, and Kester gave her a little. Again she took his hand and kissed it passionately.

"You will, perhaps, curse me for what I am about to tell you," she went on, "but whether you do so or not, so may Heaven help me if it is anything more than the simple truth! Kester St. George, you have no right to the name you bear—to the name the world knows you by!"

Kester was so startled that for a moment or two he sat like one suddenly stricken dumb. "Go on," he said at last. "There's more to follow. I like boldness in lying as in everything else."

"Again I swear that I am telling you no more than the solemn truth."

"If I am not Kester St. George," he said, with a sneer, "perhaps you will kindly inform me who I really am."

"You are my son!"

He flung the woman's hand savagely from him, and sprang to his feet with an oath. "Your son!" he said. "Ha! ha! ha! Your son, indeed! Since when have your senses quite left you, Mother Mim? A dark cell in Bedlam and a strait-waistcoat would be your best physic."

"I am rightly punished," moaned the woman—"rightly punished. I ought to have told you years ago—aye—before you ever grew to be a man. But I loved you so, and had such pride in you, that I couldn't bear the thought of telling you, and it's only now when I'm on my deathbed that the secret forces itself from me. But it will go no further, never you fear that. No living soul but you will ever hear it from my lips; and you have only got to keep your own lips tightly shut, and you will live and die as Kester St. George."

She sank back with the exhaustion of speaking. Mechanically, and almost without knowing what he was doing, Kester again gave her a little brandy. Then he sat down; and Mother Mim, finding his hand close by, took possession of it again. He shuddered slightly, but did not withdraw it.

Although Mother Mim had advanced no proofs in support of the strange story she had just told him, there was something in her tone which carried conviction to his inmost heart.

"I must know more of this," he said, after a little while, speaking almost in a whisper.

"How well I remember everything about it! It seems only like yesterday that it all happened," sighed the woman. "You—my own child, and he—the other one that was sent to me to nurse, were born within a few hours of one another. His father broke a blood-vessel about six weeks after the child was brought to me. The mother went with her husband to Italy to take care of him, and the child was left with me. A week or two afterwards he was taken suddenly ill, and died. Then the devil tempted me to put my own boy into the place of the lost heir. When Mrs. St. George came back from Italy she came to see her child, and you were shown to her as that child. She accepted you without a moment's suspicion. They let you stay with me till you were eight years old, and then they took you away and sent you to school. My husband and my sister were the only two beside myself who knew what had been done, and they both died years ago without saying a word. I shall join them in a few days, and then you alone will be the keeper of the secret. With you it will die, and on your tombstone they will write: 'Here lies the body of Kester St. George.'"

She had told her story with great difficulty, and with frequent interruptions to gather strength and breath to finish it. She now lay back, utterly exhausted. Her eyes closed, her hand relaxed its hold on Kester's, her jaw dropped slightly, the thin white face grew thinner and whiter: it seemed as if Death, passing that way, had looked in unexpectedly, and had beckoned her to go with him. Kester rose quickly, and struck a match and lighted a fragment of candle that he found on the chimney-piece. His next impulse was to try and revive her with a little brandy. But he paused with the glass in his hand. Why try to revive her? Would it not be better for him, for her, for everyone, if she were really dead? If such were the case, it would do away with all fear of her strange secret being ever divulged to anyone else. Yes—in every way her death would be a welcome release.

It was not without a tremor, it was not without a faster beating of the heart, that Kester took the bit of cracked looking-glass from the wall and held it to the woman's lips. His very life seemed to stand still for a moment or two while he waited for the result. It came. The glass clouded faintly. The woman was not dead. With a muttered curse Kester dashed the glass across the floor and put back the candle on the chimney-piece. Then he took up his hat. Where was the use of staying longer? She could tell him nothing more when she should have come to her senses than she had told him already: nothing, that is, of any consequence; and as for details, he did not want them—at least, not now. What he had been told already held food enough for thought for some time to come. He paused for a moment before going

out. Was it really possible—was it really credible, that that haggard, sharp-featured woman was his mother?—that his father had been a coarse, common labouring-man, a mere hedger and ditcher, who had lived and died in that mean hut, and that he himself, instead of being the Kester St. George he had always believed himself to be, was no other than the son of those two—the boy of whose supposed death he remembered to have heard about when little more than a mere child?

Fiercely and savagely he told himself again and again that such a thing could not be—that what Mother Mim had told him was nothing more than a pack of devil's lies—the invention of a brain weakened and distorted by illness and the clouds of coming death. It was high time to go. He put five sovereigns on the chimney-piece, went softly out, and shut the door behind him. The girl was sitting on the low mud-wall near the door, with the skirt of her dress drawn over her head as some protection from the bitter wind. Her black, glittering eyes took him in from head to foot as he walked up to her. "Go insideat once. She has fainted," said Kester. The girl nodded and went. Then Kester mounted his horse and rode slowly homeward through the chilly twilight. Bitterest thoughts held him as with a vice. When he came within sight of the chimneys of Park Newton, he gave a sigh of relief, and put spurs to his horse. "That is mine, and no power on earth shall take it from me," he muttered. "That and the money that comes with it. I am Kester St. George. Let those disprove it who can!"

A few nights later, as Lionel Dering was sitting in his dressing-room, smoking a last cigar before turning in, there came three low, distinct taps at the door, which he recognised as the peculiar signal of Dobbs. It was nearly an hour past midnight, and in that early household every-one had been long abed, or, at least, had retired long ago to their own rooms.

Lionel opened the door, and Dobbs slid softly in. Such visits were by no means infrequent, but they were usually paid at a somewhat earlier hour than on the present occasion.

"Come in, Dobbs," said Lionel, "You are later to-night than usual."

"Yes, sir, I am, and I must ask you to pardon me for intruding at such an hour; but, if you remember, sir, you told me, a little while ago, that I was to let you know without fail the very next time my master took to walking in his sleep."

"Quite right, Dobbs. I am glad that you have not forgotten my instructions."

"Well, sir, Mr. St. George left his rooms, a few minutes ago, fast asleep."

"In which direction did he go?"

"He went down the side staircase, and through the conservatory, and let himself out through the little glass door into the garden."

"And then which way did he go?"

"I did not follow him any further, but ran at once to tell you."

"Have you any idea as to what direction he would be most likely to take?"

"There is little doubt, sir, but that he has gone towards the Wizard's Fountain, in the Sycamore Walk. Three times already, that is the place to which he has gone."

"We must follow him, Dobbs."

"Yes, sir."

"We must watch him, but be careful not to disturb him."

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose there is little or no fear of his waking before he gets back to the house?"

"None whatever, sir, as far as my experience goes. As a rule he goes quietly back to his own rooms, undresses himself as quietly and soberly as if he was wide awake, and gets into bed; and when he does really wake up in the morning, he never seems to know anything about what has happened overnight. But we must make haste, sir, if we wish to overtake him."

"I will be ready in one minute."

Lionel wrapped a warm furred cloak about him, and put a travelling-cap on his head. Three minutes later he and Dobbs stood together in the open air.

The night was clear, crisp, and cold. The moon was just rising above the tree-tops, bathing the upper part of the quaint old house in its white glory, but as yet the shrubbery and the garden-paths lay in deepest shadow. Nowhere could they discern the figure of the man whom they had come out to follow; but the Wizard's Fountain was a good half mile from the Hall, so they struck at once into the nearest footway that led towards it. A few minutes' quick walking took them there. Lionel knew the place well. It had been a favourite haunt of his when living at Park Newton during the few happy weeks that preceded the murder. Very weird and solemn the whole place looked, as seen by moonlight at this still hour of the night.

Although known as the Sycamore Walk, there were only two trees of that particular kind growing there, and they threw their antique shadows immediately over the fountain itself. The rest of the avenue consisted of beech, and oak, and elm. But all the trees were huge, and old, and fantastic: untended and uncared for—growing together year after year, whispering their leafy secrets to each other with every spring that came round, and standing shoulder to shoulder against the winds of winter: a hoary brotherhood of forest sages.

The fountain itself, whatever it might have been in years long gone by, was now nothing more than a confused heap of huge stones, overgrown with lichens and creepers. From the midst of them, and from

what had doubtless at one time been a representation in marble of the head of a leopard or other forest animal, but which now was worn almost past recognition, trickled a thin stream of coldest water. Which, falling into a broken basin below, overbrimmed itself there, and was lost among the cracks and interstices in the masses of broken masonry that lay scattered around.

"You had better, perhaps, wait here," said Lionel to Dobbs as they halted for a moment at the entrance to the avenue.

Dobbs did as he was bidden, and Lionel advanced alone, keeping well within the shade of the trees. When within a dozen yards of the fountain he halted and waited. The low, ceaseless monotone of the fountain was the only sound that broke the moonlit silence.

From out the dense shadow of the trees on the opposite side of the avenue, and as if he himself were part of that shadow, Kester St. George slowly emerged. In the middle of the avenue, and in the full light of the moon, he paused. His right hand was thrust into the bosom of his vest, as if he were hiding something there. Standing thus, he seemed, as it were, to shrink within himself. Still hugging that hidden something, he seemed to listen—to listen as if his very life depended on the act. Then, with a slow, creeping motion, as though his feet were weighted with lead, he stole towards the fountain. He reached it. He grasped the stonework with one hand, and then he turned to gaze, as though in dread of some hidden pursuer. Then slowly, almost reluctantly, he seemed to draw something from within his vest, and, while still gazing furtively around him, he thrust his arm, elbow deep, into a crevice in the masonry, let it rest there for a single moment, and then withdrew it. With the same furtively restless look, and ears that seemed to listen more intently than ever, he paused for an instant. Then he stole swiftly back across the moonlit avenue, and so vanished among the black shadows from whence he had come.

So natural had been his actions, so unstudied his every movement, that it seemed impossible to believe that he was indeed asleep.

Hardly had Kester St. George disappeared, before Lionel Dering was by the fountain, on the very spot where his cousin had stood half a minute before. He had noted well the place. There, before him, was the very crevice into which Kester had thrust his arm. Into that same crevice was Lionel's arm now thrust—elbow deep—shoulder deep. His groping fingers soon laid hold of that which was hidden there. He drew out his arm quickly, and the something that he had found glittered steel-blue in the moonlight. With a cry of horror he dropped it, and it fell with a dull clash among the stones. Lionel Dering had recognised it in a moment as a dagger which he had last seen in the possession of Percy Osmond.

(*To be continued.*)

ABEL CREW.

THINGS are done in remote country places that would not be done in towns. Whether the law is understood by us, or whether it is not, it often happens that it is very much exceeded, or otherwise not acted upon. Those who have to exercise it sometimes show themselves as ignorant as if they had lived all their lives in the wilds of America.

Old Jones the constable was one of these. When not checked by his masters, the magistrates, he would do most outrageous things—speaking of legality and common sense. And he did one in reference to Abel Crew.

George Reed's two little children, Susan and Henrietta, twins, aged one year, less two weeks, had died suddenly and in great agony. Sick from the cutting of their teeth, the mother, Hester Reed, had administered to each a delectable compound of sugar and warm water and two smashed-up pills. That is, a pill apiece. The pills were supposed to have killed the children. They had been furnished to Mrs. Reed some weeks before, for her own especial swallowing, by Abel Crew the herbalist. I still say Crew. Though it had come out that his name was Carew, we should be sure to call him Crew to the end.

The inquest might have been concluded at its first sitting, but for two malcontents amid the jury. Perkins the butcher and Dobbs the blacksmith. Truth to say these two had plenty of intelligence: which could not be said of all the rest. The ten pronounced the case to be as clear as daylight: the infants had been poisoned by Abel Crew's pills. These ten were ready and willing to return a verdict of manslaughter there and then, and the coroner seemed to agree with them—he hated trouble. But Dobbs and Perkins held out. They were not satisfied, they said; the pills furnished by Abel Crew might not have been the same pills that were taken by the children; moreover, they considered that the pills should be "more officially" analysed. Pettipher the druggist was all very well in his small way, but hardly up, in their opinion, to pronouncing upon pills when a man's life or liberty was at stake. They pressed for an adjournment, that the pills might be examined by some competent authority. The coroner, as good as telling them they were fools to their faces, adjourned the inquest in suppressed passion to that day week.

"And I've got to take care of you, Abel Crew," said old Jones, floundering up on his gouty legs to Abel as the jury and crowd dispersed. "You've got to come along o' me."

"To come where?" asked Abel, who was hobbling towards home

on his scalded foot, by the help of his stick and the arm of Gibbon the gamekeeper.

"To the lock-up," said old Jones.

"To the lock-up!" echoed Abel Crew.

"In course," returned old Jones. "Where else but the lock-up? Did you think it was to the pound?"

Abel Crew, lifting the hand that held his stick to brush a speck of dirt off his handsome velvet coat, turned to the constable; his nice face, a little paler than usual, gazing inquiringly at old Jones's, his silver hair shining in the setting sun.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Jones," he said calmly. "You cannot mean to lock me up."

"Well I never!" cried old Jones; who had a knack of considering every suspected person guilty, and treating them accordingly. "You have got a cheek, you have, Abel Crew! Not a going to take me to the lock-up, Mr. Jones, says you! Where 'ould you be took to? Come!"

"But there's no necessity for it," said Abel. "I shall not run away. I shall be in my house if I'm wanted again."

"I daresay you would!" said old Jones. "You might or you mightn't, you know. You're as good as committed for the killing and slaying o' them there two twins, and it's my business to see as you *don't* make your escape aforehand, Abel Crew."

Lots of listeners had come up by this time; quite a crowd of us. I gave old Jones a bit of my mind.

"He is not yet committed, Jones, therefore you have no right to take him or to lock him up."

"You don't know nothing about it, Mr. Ludlow. I do. The crowner give me a hint, and I'm acting on it. 'Don't you go and let that man escape,' says his worship to me; 'it'll be at your peril if you do.' '*I'll* see to him, your worship,' says I. And I be a doing of it."

But it was hardly likely that the coroner meant Abel Crew to be confined in that precious lock-up for a whole week. One night, when prisoners did get into it, was pretty well. At least, I did not think he meant it; but the crowd, to judge by their comments, seemed divided on the point.

"The shortest way to settle the question will be to ask the coroner, old Jones," said I, turning to run back to the Silver Lion. "Come along!"

"You'd be clever to catch him, Master Johnny," roared out old Jones after me. "His worship jumped into his gig, which was a waiting for him when he come out o' the inquest room, and his clerk druv him off at a slapping pace."

It was true. The coroner was gone: and old Jones had it all his own way; for, you see, none of us liked to interfere with an official

gentleman who held sway in the county and sat on dead people. Abel Crew accepted the alternative meekly, as he did most things.

"Any way, you must allow me to go home first and lock my house up, and do one or two little matters that I must do," said he.

"Not unless you goes under my own eyes," retorted old Jones. "You might be for destroying of your stock o' pills for fear they should bear evidence again you, Abel Crew."

"My pills are, of all things, what I would not destroy," said Abel. "They would bear testimony for me, instead of against me, for they are innocent."

So Abel Crew hobbled to his cottage on the common, attended by old Jones and a long tail of followers. Arrived there, he attended the first thing to his scalded foot, dressing it with some of his own ointment. Then he secured some bread-and-butter, not knowing what the accommodation at the Lock-up might be in the shape of eatables, and changed his handsome quaint suit of clothes for those he wore every day. After that, he was escorted back to the Lock-up.

Now, the Lock-up was in Piefinch-Cut, nearly opposite to Dovey the blacksmith's. I have heard the Squire say that he remembered the time when the Lock-up stood alone; when Piefinch-Cut had no more houses in it than Piefinch Lane now has; but since then Piefinch-Cut had been built upon and inhabited; houses touching even the sacred walls of the Lock-up. A tape-and-cotton and sweetstuff shop flanked it on one side, and a small pork-butcher's on the other. Pettipher's druggist's shop, should anybody be curious on the point, was next to the tape and cotton mart.

To see Abel Crew arrive in the custody of old Jones the constable, and the excited tail of stragglers after them, astonished Piefinch-Cut not a little. Figg the pawnbroker—who was originally from Alcester—considered himself learned in the law. Any way he was a great talker, and liked to give his opinion upon any topic that might turn up. His shop joined Dovey's forge: and when we got up, Figg was outside, holding forth to Dovey, who had his shirt-sleeves rolled up above his elbows as usual and his leather apron on. Mrs. Dovey stood listening behind, in the smart gown and red-ribboned bonnet she had worn at the inquest.

"Why—what on earth!—have they been and gone and took up Crew?" cried Figg in his surprise.

"It is an awful shame of old Jones," I burst in; speaking more to Dovey than Figg, for Figg was no favourite of mine. "A whole week of the Lock-up! Only think of it, Dovey!"

"But have they brought it in again' him, Master Johnny?" cried Dovey, unfolding his grimey arms to touch his paper cap to me as he spoke.

"*No;* that's what they have not done. The inquest is adjourned for

a week ; and I don't believe old Jones has a right to take him at all. Not in law, you know."

"That's just what her brought word," said Dovey, with a nod backward to indicate his wife. "'Well, how be it turned, Ann?' says I to her when her come back—for I'd got a sight o' work in to-day and couldn't go myself. 'Oh, it haven't turned no ways yet, Jack,' says her, 'it be put off to next week?' There he goes! right in."

This last remark applied to Abel Crew. After fumbling in his pocket for the two big keys, tied together by string, and then fumbling at the latch, old Jones succeeded in opening the door. Not being used much, the lock was apt to grow rusty. Then he stood back, and with a flourish of hands motioned Abel in. In he went, making no resistance.

"They must know for certain as 'twere his pills what done it," struck in Mrs. Dovey.

"No they don't," said I. "What's more, I don't think it was his pills. Abel Crew says he never put poison in his pills yet, and I believe him."

"Well and no more it don't stand to reason as he would, Mr. Ludlow," said Figg, a man whose self-complaisance was not to be put down by any amount of discouragement. "I were just a saying so to Dovey.—— Why have old Jones took him up?" went on Figg to Gibbon the gamekeeper, who came sauntering by.

"Jones says he has the coroner's orders for it," answered Gibbon.

"Look here : I know a bit about law; and I know a man oughtn't to be shut up till some charge is brought again' him," added Figg. "Crew's pills is suspected, but he have not been charged yet."

"Any way, it's what Jones has gone and done," said Gibbon. "Perhaps he is right. And a week's not much : it'll soon pass. But as to any pills of Abel Crew's having killed them children, it's just preposterous to think of it."

"What d'ye suppose did kill 'em, then, Richard Gibbon?" demanded Ann Dovey, a hot flush on her face, her tone resentful.

"That's just what has to be found out," returned Gibbon, passing on his way.

"If it hadn't been for that there Dobbs and Butcher Perkins a holding-out again it, Crew 'ud ha' been brought in guilty safe enough," said Ann Dovey. And the tone was again so excited, so bitterly resentful against Dobbs and Perkins, that I could not help looking at her in wonder. It sounded just as though the non-committal of Abel were a wrong inflicted on herself.

"No, he would not have been brought in guilty," I answered her. "He would have been committed for trial: but that's a different thing. If the matter could be sifted to the bottom, I know it would be found that the mischief did not lie with Abel Crew's pills. There, Mrs. Dovey."

She was looking at me out of the corners of her eyes; for all the world as if she were afraid of me, or of what I said. I could not make her out.

"Why should you wish so particularly to bring it home to Crew?" I pointedly asked her: and Figg turned round and looked at her, as if seconding the question.

"Me want particular to bring it home to Crew!" she retorted, her voice rising to a shriek with temper, or fear, or something; and she trembling like an aspen leaf. "I don't want to bring it home particular to him, Mr. Ludlow. 'Twere his pills, though, all the same, what done it."

And with that she whisked through the forge to her kitchen.

On the day following I got old Jones to let me into the Lock-up. The place consisted of two rooms opening into one another, and a small square space, no bigger than a closet, with a writing-desk in it, at the end of the passage, where they kept the pen and ink. For that had a window in it, looking to the fields at the back; the two rooms had only skylights in the roof. In the inner room a narrow iron bedstead stood against the wall, a mattress and blanket on it. Abel was sitting on that when we went in.

"You must have been lively here last night, Abel!"

"Yes, very, sir," answered he, with a half smile. "I did not really mind it: I am used to be alone, you know. I could have done with fewer rats, though."

"Oh, are there rats here?"

"Lots of them, Master Johnny. I don't like rats: nasty things! They came upon my face, and all about me."

"Why does old Jones not set traps for them? He considers this place to be under his special protection."

"There's too many for any trap to catch," answered Abel.

Old Jones had gone off to the desk in the closet, having left some bread and butter and milk on the shelf for Abel. His errand there was to enter the cost of the bread in the account-book, to be settled for, later. Prisoners in the Lock-up were commonly treated to bread and water: old Jones had graciously allowed this one to pay for some butter and milk from his own pocket.

"I don't want never to treat 'em harsher nor I be obliged, Master Ludlow," he had said to me, coming in, in reference to the paper of butter and the jug of milk he was carrying. "Abel Crew have been known as a decent man ever since he come among us: and if he chooses to pay for the butter and the milk, there ain't no law again' his having 'em. 'Tain't as if he was a burglar."

"No, he is not a burglar," I answered. "And you must mind that

you do not get into the wrong box about him. There's neither law nor justice in locking him up, Jones, before he is charged."

"If I had never locked up nobody till they was charged, I should ha' been in the wrong box many a time afore now," said old Jones, doggedly. "Look at that there man last Christmas; what I caught prowling in the grounds at Parrifer Hall, with a whole set of house-breaking things concealed in his pockets. After I'd took him, and lodged him in here safe, it was found that he was one o' the worst characters in the county, only let out o' Worcester jail two days afore. Suppose I'd not took him, Master Johnny?—where 'ud the spoons at Parrifer Hall ha' been?"

"That was a different case altogether."

"*I* know what I'm about," returned Jones. "The coroner, he just give me a nod or two, looking at Crew as he give it. I knew what it meant, sir: a nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse."

Any way, Jones had got him, here in the Lock-up; and had gone off to enter the loaf of bread in the account-book; and I was sitting on the bench opposite Abel.

"It is a wicked shame of them to have put you here, Abel."

"It is not right in law—as I believe," he answered. "And I am sure it is not in justice, sir. I swear those pills and that box, produced at the inquest, were none of mine. They never went out of my hands. Old Jones thinks he is doing right to secure me, I suppose, and he is civil over it; so I must not grumble. He brought me some water to wash in this morning, and a comb."

"But there's no *sense* in it. You would not attempt to escape; you would wait for the reassembling of the inquest."

"Escape!" he exclaimed. "I should be the first to stay for it. I am more anxious than any one to have the matter investigated. Truth to say, Master Johnny, my curiosity is excited. Hester Reed is so persistently sure in regard to their being the same pills and box that I gave her; and as she is a truthful, honest woman, one can't see where the mistake lies. There must be mystery in it somewhere."

"Suppose you are committed to take your trial? And found guilty?"

"That I shall be committed, I look upon as certain," he answered. "As to being found guilty—if I am, I must bear it. God knows my innocence, and I must try to let that help me. I shall hope that in time He will bring it to light."

"All the same, Abel, they ought not to put you in here."

"That's true, sir."

"And then there will be the lying in prison until the Assizes—two or three good months to come! Don't you go and die of it, Abel."

"No, I shall not do that," he answered, smiling a little. "My innocence will keep me up."

I sat looking at him. What light could get in through the dusty skylight fell on his silver hair, smooth as usual, thanks to the comb, and falling back from his pale face. He held his head down in thought, only raising it to answer me. Some movement in the closet betokened old Jones's speedy approach, and I hastened to assure Abel that all sensible people would not doubt his innocence.

"Nobody need doubt it, Master Johnny," he answered firmly, his eye kindling. "I have never had a grain of arsenic in my house; I have never had any other poison. There are herbs from which poison may be distilled, but I have never gathered them. When it comes to people requiring poison—and there are some diseases of the human frame that it may be good for—they should go to a qualified medical man, not to a herbalist. No. I have never, never had poison or poisonous herbs within my dwelling; therefore (putting other reasons aside) it is *impossible* that those poisonous pills can be my pills. God hears me say it, and knows that it is true."

Old Jones, balancing the keys in his hand and himself on his fat and gouty legs, was standing within the room, listening. Abel Crew was so respectable and courteous a prisoner, compared to those he generally had in the Lock-up, burglars, tipsy men, and the like, returning him "thank yous" instead of oaths, that he had already begun to regard him with some favour, and the assertion seemed to make an impression on him.

"Look here," said he. "Whose pills could they have been, if they warn't your'n?"

"I cannot imagine," returned Abel Crew. "I am as curious about it as anybody else—Master Ludlow here knows I am. I daresay it will come out sometime. They *could not* have been made up by me."

"What was that you told the coroner about your pill-boxes being marked?" asked old Jones.

"And so they are marked; all of them. The pill-box I saw there——"

"I mean the stock o' boxes you've got at home. Be them all marked?"

"Every one of them. When I get in a fresh lot of pill-boxes, the first thing I do, on bringing them home, is to mark them."

"Then look here. You just trust me with the key of your place, and tell me where the boxes is to be found, and I'll go and secure 'em and lay 'em afore the coroner. If they're found to be all marked, it'll tell in your favour."

The advice sounded good, and Abel Crew handed over his key. Jones looked solemn as he and I went away together.

"It's an odd thing, though, Master Johnny, ain't it, how the pison could ha' got into them there pills," said he slowly, as he put the big key into the lock of the outer door.

And we had an audience round us before the words were well spoken.

To see the Lock-up made fast when there was a prisoner inside it, was always a coveted recreation in Piefinch-Cut. Several individuals had come running up; not to speak of children from the gutters. Dovey stood in front of his forge gazing; Figg, who liked to be lounging about outside when he had no customers transacting delicate negociations inside, put his back against his shop window and stared in concert with Dovey. Jones, flourishing the two formidable keys, crossed over to them.

"How do he feel to-day?" asked Figg, nodding towards the Lock-up.

"He don't feel no worse apparently nor he do other days," replied old Jones. "It be a regular odd thing, it be."

"What be odd?" asked Dovey.

"How the pison could ha' got into them there pills. Crew says he has never had no pison in his place o' no kind, herbs nor else."

"And I would stake my life that it is the truth," I put in.

"Well, and so I think it is," said Dovey. "Last night George Reed was in here, a talking. He says he one day come across Abel Crew looking for herbs in the copse behind the Grange. Crew was picking and choosing: some herbs he'd leave alone, and some he dug up. Reed spied out a fine-looking plant, and called to him. Up comes Crew, trowel in hand, bends down to take a look, and then gives his head a shake. 'That won't do for me,' says he, 'that plant has poisonous properties,' says he; 'and I never meddles with them what has,' saye he. George Reed told us that much in this here forge last night. Him and his wife have a'most had words about it."

"Had words about what?" asked old Jones.

"Why about them there pills. Reed tells her that if it is the pills what poisoned the young ones, she have made some mull o' the box Abel give her and got it changed. But he don't believe as 'twere the pills at all. And Hester Reed, she sticks to it that she never made no mull o' the box, and that the pills is the same."

At this juncture, happening to turn my head, I saw Mrs. Dovey at the door at the back of the forge. Her body was in the kitchen, her face was screwed round the doorpost, listening; and there was a great fear on it. Seeing me looking at her, she disappeared like a shot, and quietly closed the door. A thought flashed into me.

"That woman knows more about it than she will say! And it is frightening her. What can the mystery be?"

The children were buried on the Sunday afternoon, all the parish flocking to the funeral; and the next morning Abel Crew was released. Whether old Jones took a qualm as to the legality of what he had done, or whether he got a mandate from the coroner by the early post, nobody knew. Certain it was, that before nine o'clock old Jones held the Lock-up doors open, and Abel Crew walked out. It was thought that some one must have written privately to the coroner—which was more than

likely. Old Jones was down in the mouth all day, as if he had had an official blowing up.

Abel and his stick went home. The rest and his own doctoring had nearly cured the instep. On the Saturday old Jones had made a descent upon the cottage and cleared it of the pill-boxes. Jones found that every box had Abel's private mark upon it.

"Well, this is a curious start, Crew!" exclaimed Mr. Duffham, meeting him as he was turning in at his gate. "Now in the Lock-up, and now out of it! It may be old Jones's notion of law, but it's not mine. How have you enjoyed it?"

"It would not have been so bad but for the rats, sir," replied Abel. "I could see a few stars shining through the skylight."

"Well, this is a curious start!" Duffham was repeating the phrase to himself this time, and in an undertone: it was rather a favourite of his, just then. The days had gone on to the Thursday, and it was now the evening before the adjourned inquest. Tod and I, in consideration of the popular ferment, had taken the Squire at a favourable moment, and extracted from him another week's holiday. Opinions were divided: some believed in Crew, others in the poisoned pills. As to Crew himself, he was out in his garden as usual, attending to his bees and his herbs and flowers, and quietly awaiting the good or the ill-luck that Fate might be holding in store for him.

It was Thursday evening, I say; and I was taking tea with Duffham. Having looked in upon him, when rushing about the place, he asked me to stay. The conversation turned upon the all-engrossing topic; and I chanced to mention that the behaviour of Ann Dovey puzzled me. Upon that, Duffham said that it was puzzling him. He had been called in to her the previous day and found her in a regular fever, eyes anxious, breath hysterical, face hectic. Since the day of the inquest she had been in this state, and the blacksmith told Duffham he could not make out what had come to her. "Them pills have druv her mad, sir," were Dovey's words, "she can't get 'em off her mind."

The last cup of tea was poured out, and Duffham was shaking round the old black pot to see if he could squeeze out more, when we had an interruption. Dovey came bursting in upon us straight from his forge; his black hair all ruffled, and his small dark face hot with flurry. It was a singular tale he had come to tell. His wife had been making a confession to him. Driven pretty nearly out of her mind by the weight of a secret, she could hold it no longer.

To begin at the beginning. Dovey's house swarmed with black beetles. Dovey himself did not mind the animals, but Mrs. Dovey did; and no wonder, when she could not step out of bed in the night without putting her foot on some. But, if Dovey did not dislike black-beetles, there was another thing he did dislike—hated, in fact; and that

was the stuff called Beetle-Powder : which professed to kill them. Mrs. Dovey would have scattered some on the floor every night ; but Dovey would not allow it. He forbid her to bring a grain of it into the house : it was nothing but poison, he said, and might chance to kill themselves as well as the beetles. Ann Dovey had her way in most matters, for Dovey was easy, as men and husbands go ; but when once he put his veto on a thing, she knew she might as well try to turn the house round as turn him.

Now what did Ann Dovey do? On that very Easter Tuesday, as it chanced, as soon as dusk set in, off she went to Dame Chad's general shop in Church Dykely, where the beetle-powder was sold, and bought a packet of it. It seemed to her, that of the choice between two evils—to put up with the horrible black animals, or to disobey Dovey, the latter was the more agreeable. She could easily shake some of the powder down lightly of a night ; the beetles—or, as she always pronounced it, beedles—would eat it up before morning, and Dovey would never know it. Accordingly, paying for the powder—a square packet, done up in blue paper, on which was labelled POISON in as large letters as the printer could get into the space—she thrust it down to the depths of her gown pocket, and set off home again. Calling in at George Reed's cottage on her way, she there assisted, as it also chanced, at the administering of the pills to the unfortunate children. And perhaps her motive for calling in was not so much from a love of presiding at physic-giving, as that she might be able to say "At Reed's," if her husband asked her where she had been when she got home. It fell out as she thought. No sooner had she put foot inside the forge than Dovey began, Where'st been, Ann? and she told him at Reed's helping with the sick little ones. Dovey's work was over for the night ; he wanted his supper ; and she had no opportunity of using the beetle-powder. It was left untouched in the pocket of her gown. The following morning came the astounding news of the children's death ; and in the excitement caused by that, Mrs. Dovey lost sight of the powder. Perhaps she thought that the general stir might cause Dovey to be more wakeful than usual, and that she might as well let the powder be for a short while. It was safe where it was, in her hung-up gown. Dovey never meddled with her pockets : on or off, they were no concern of his.

But, on the Friday morning, when putting on this same holiday gown to attend the inquest, to which she had been summoned, what was her horror to find the packet burst, and her pocket filled with the loose powder. Mrs. Dovey had no greater love for beetle-powder in itself than she had for beetles, and visibly shuddered. She could not empty it out ; there it had to stay ; for Dovey, excited by his wife's having to give evidence, was in and out of her room like a dog in a fair ; and she went off perforce with the stuff in her pocket. And

when during her examination the questions took the turn they did take, and the coroner asked her whether she had had any poison in her pocket that night at George Reed's: this with the consciousness of what had been that night in her pocket, of what was in her pocket at that very moment, then present, nearly frightened her into fits. From that hour, Ann Dovey had lived in a state of terror. It was not that she believed any of the beetle-powder *could* have got inside the ill-fated young ones (though she did not feel quite easy on the point), as that she feared the accusation might be shifted off Crew's shoulders and on to hers. On this Thursday evening she could hold out no longer: and disclosed all to Dovey.

Dovey burst upon us in a heat. He was as straightforward a man as ever lived, of an intensely honest nature, and could no more have kept it in, now that he knew it, than he could have given up all righteous dealing together. His chief concern was to tell the truth, and to restore peace to his wife. He went through the narrative to Duffham without stopping; and seemed not in the least to care for my being present.

"It ain't *possible*, sir; there ain't a moral *possibility* that any o' that there dratted powder could ha' come anigh the babies," wound up Dovey. "I'd be thankful, sir, if you'd come down and quieten her a bit; her be in a fine way."

What with surprise and what with the man's rapid speech, Duffham had not taken in the one half of the tale. He had simply sat behind the tea-pot and stared.

"My good fellow, I don't understand," he said. "A pocketful of poison! What on earth made her take poison to George Reed's?"

So Dovey went over the heads of the story again. "'Twere in her pocket, sir, it's true: but the chances is that at that time the paper hadn't burst. None of it *couldn't* ha' got to them there two young ones."

To see the blacksmith's earnestness was good. His face was as eager, his tone as imploring as though he were pleading for his life.

"And it 'ud be a work o' charity, sir, if you'd just step down and see her. I'd pay handsome for the visit, sir; anything you please to charge. She's like one a going right out of her mind."

"I'll come," said Duffham: who had his curiosity upon the point. And the blacksmith set out on the run home again. Which brings us back a bit.

"Well, this is a curious start!" said Duffham to himself.

"Could the beetle-powder have poisoned the children?" I asked.

"I don't know, Johnny. It is an odd tale altogether. We will go down and inquire into it."

Which of course implied that he expected me to go with him Nothing loath, was I; more eager than he.

Swallowing what was left of the tea and bread-and-butter, we went on to Piefinch-Cut. Ann Dovey was alone, save for her husband and mother. She flung herself on the sofa when she saw us—the blacksmith's house was comfortably off for furniture—and began to shriek.

"Now just you stop that, Ann Dovey," said Duffham, who was always short with hysterics. "I want to come to the bottom of this business; you can't tell it me while you scream. What in the world possessed you to go about with your pocket full of poison?"

She had her share of sense, and knew Duffham was not one to be trifled with; so she told the tale as well as she could for sobs.

"Have you mentioned this out of doors?" was the first question Duffham asked when it was over.

"No," interposed Dovey. "I telled 'em not to be soft enough for that. Not a soul have heard it, sir; but her"—pointing to the old mother—"and you and Master Johnny. We don't want to get all the parish swarming about us like so many hornets."

"Good," said Duffham. "But it is rather a serious thing, I fear. Uncertain at any rate."

"Be it, sir?" returned Ann, raising her heavy eyes questioningly. "Do you think so?"

"Why, you see, the mischief must have lain between that beetle-powder and Crew's pills. As Crew is so careful a man, I don't think it could have been the pills; and that's the truth."

"But how could the beedle-powder have got anigh the children out of my pocket, sir?" she asked, her face scarlet, her eyes wild. "I never put my hand into my pocket, while I sat there; I never did."

"You can't be sure of that," retorted Duffham. "We may put our hands into our pockets fifty times a day without remembering it."

"D'you suppose, sir, I should take out some o' that there beedle-powder and cram it down the poor innocents' throats?" she demanded, on the verge of further screams.

"Where is the powder?" questioned Duffham.

The powder was where it had been all along: in the gown pocket. Wan't of opportunity, through fear of Dovey's eyes, or dread of touching the stuff, had kept her from meddling with it. When she took the gown off the night of the inquest, she hung it up on the accustomed hook in the garret, and there it was still. The old mother went and brought it forward, handling it gingerly: a very smart print gown with bright flowers upon it.

Duffham looked round, saw a tin pie-dish, and turned the pocket inside out into it. A speckled kind of powder, brown and white. He plunged his fingers into it fearlessly, felt it, and smelt it. The blue paper it had been sold in lay amid it, cracked all across. Duffham took it up.

"Poison!" read out he aloud, gazing at the large letters through his

spectacles. "How came you to let it break open in your pocket, Ann Dovey?"

"I didn't let it; it braked of itself," she sobbed. "If you saw the black-beedles we gets here of a night, sir, your legs 'ud be fit to dance a hornpipe, they would. The floor be covered with 'em.

"If the ceiling was covered with 'em too, I'd not have that there dangerous stuff brought into the place—and so I've telled ye," roared Dovey.

"It's frightful uncomfortable, is black beedles; mother knows it," said his wife in a subdued voice—for Dovey in great things was master. "I thought if I just sprinkled a bit on't down, it 'ud take 'em away, and couldn't hurt nobody?"

"And you went off on the sly that there Tuesday night and bought it," he retorted; "and come back and telled me you had been to Reed's a helping to physic the babies."

"And so I had been there, a helping to physic 'em."

"Did you go straight to Reed's from the shop—with this powder?" asked Duffham.

"It were right at the bottom o' my pocket: I put it there as soon as Dame Chad had served me with it," sobbed Ann Dovey. "And I can be upon my Bible oath, Dr. Duffham, I never touched it after; and I don't believe it had burst then. A coming hasty out o' Reed's back gate, for I were in a hurry to get home here, the side o' me where the pocket is swung again the post, and I think the blue paper must ha' burst then. I never knowed it had burst, for I'd never thought no more about the beedles, till I put on the gown to go up to the inquest. Master Johnny, you be a staring at me fearful, but I be telling nothing but the naked truth."

She did seem to be telling the truth. And as to my "staring at her fearful," that was just her imagination. I was listening to the talk from the elbow of the easy wooden chair, where I had perched myself. Duffham recommended Dovey to put the tin dish and its contents away safely, so that it did not get near any food, but not to destroy the stuff just yet. He talked a bit with Ann, left her a composing draught, and came away.

"I don't see that the powder could have had anything to do with the children's death," I said to him as we went along.

"Neither do I, Johnny?"

"Shall you have to declare this at the inquest to-morrow, Mr. Duffham?"

"I'm sure I don't know," he answered, looking up at the sky overhead through his spectacles, just as a perplexed owl might do. "It might only serve to complicate matters: and I don't think it's possible it could have been the powder. On the other hand, if it be proved not to have been the pills, we have only this poisonous powder to

fall back upon. It is a strange affair altogether, take it in all its bearings."

I did not answer. The evening star was beginning to show itself in the sky.

"I must feel my way in this, Johnny: be guided by circumstances," he resumed, when we halted at the stile that led across the fields to the Manor. "We must watch the turn matters take to-morrow at the inquest. Of course if I find it necessary to declare it, I shall delare it. Meanwhile, lad, you had better not mention it to anybody."

"All right, Mr. Duffham. Good evening."

The jury went straggling into the Silver Lion by twos and threes. Up dashed the gig of the coroner, as before, he and his clerk seated side by side. All the parish had collected about the doors, and tried to push into the inquest-room.

Gliding quietly in, before the proceedings were opened, came Abel Crew in his handsome quaint velvet suit, his silver hair shining in the sunlight, his pale face calm as marble. The coroner ordered him to sit on a certain chair, and whispered to old Jones. Upon which the constable turned his gouty legs round, marched up, and stood guard over Crew, just as though Abel were his prisoner.

"Do you see that, sir?" I whispered to Duffham.

"Yes, lad, and understand it. Crew's pills have been analysed—officially this time, as the jury put it—and found to contain arsenic. Pettipher was right. The pills killed the children."

Well, you might have sent me down with a flash of moonshine. I had been fully trusting in Crew's innocence.

About the first witness called, and sworn, was the professional man from a distance who had analysed the pills. He said that they contained arsenic. Not in sufficient quantity to kill a grown person; more than sufficient to kill a little child. The coroner drew in his lips.

"I thought it must be so," he said, apparently for the benefit of the jury. "Am I to understand that these were improper pills to send out?—pills that no medical man would be likely to send?"

"Not improper at all, sir," replied the witness. "A medical man would prescribe them for certain cases. Not for children: to a child one would be what it has been here—destruction."

I felt a nudge at my elbow, and turned to see the Squire's hot face close to mine.

"Johnny, don't you ever stand up for that Crew again, mind. He ought to be hanged."

But the coroner, after a bit, seemed puzzled—or, rather, doubtful. Led to be so, perhaps, by a question put by one of the jury. It was Perkins the butcher.

"If these pills were furnished by Abel Crew for Hester Reed, a growed woman, and she went and gave one of her own accord to the two babies, ought Crew to be held responsible for that?"

Upon which there ensued some cavilling. Some of the jury holding that he was *not* responsible; others that he was. The coroner reminded them of what Hester Reed had stated in her evidence—that she had asked Crew's opinion about the suitability of the pills for children, and he had told her they were suitable.

Hester Reed was called. As the throng parted to make way for her to advance, I saw Ann Dovey seated at the back of the room, looking more dead than alive. Dovey stood by her, having made himself spruce for the occasion. Ann would have gone off a mile in some opposite direction, but old Jones's orders to all the witnesses of the former day, to appear again, had been peremptory. They had been wanted before, he told them, and might be wanted again.

"You need not look such a scare-crow with fright," I whispered in Ann Dovey's ear, making my way to her side to reassure her, the woman was so evidently miserable. "It was the pills that did the mischief, after all—didn't you hear? Nothing need come out about your pocket and the powder."

"Master Johnny, I'm just about skeered out o' my life, I am. Fit to go and drownd myself."

"Nonsense! It will be all right as far as you are concerned."

"I said it was Crew's pills, all along, I did; it couldn't have been anything else, sir. All the same, I wish I was dead."

As good as to try to comfort a post, seemingly, as Ann Dovey. I went back to my standing-place between the Squire and Duffham. Hester Reed was being questioned then.

"Yes, sir, it were some weeks ago. My little boy, George, was ailing, and I ran out o' the house to Abel Crew, seeing the old man go past the gate, and asked whether I might give him one of them there same pills, or whether it would hurt the child. Crew said I might give it freely; he said two even wouldn't hurt him."

"And did you give the pill?" asked the coroner.

"No, sir. He's a rare bad one to give physic to, Georgy is, and I let him get well without it."

"How old is he?"

"Turned of three, sir."

"You are quite, absolutely certain, Mrs. Reed, that these pills, from which you took out two to give the deceased children, were the very self-same pills you had from Abel Crew?"

"I be sure and certain of it, sir. Nobody never put a finger upon the box but me. It stood all the while in that there corner o' the press-shelf in the children's bed-room. Twice a week when I got upon a chair to dust the shelf I see it there. There was nobody in the house

but me; except the little ones. My husband don't concern himself with the places and things."

Circumstantial evidence could not well go farther. Mrs. Reed was dismissed, and the coroner told Abel Crew to come near the table. He did as he was bid, and stood there upright and manly, a gentle look on his face.

"You have heard the evidence, Abel Carew," said the coroner. "The pills have been analysed and found to contain a certain portion of arsenic—a great deal more than enough to kill a child. What have you to say to it?"

"Only this, sir: only what I said before. That the pills analysed were not my pills. The pills I gave to Mrs. Reed contained neither arsenic nor any other poison."

"It is showing great obstinacy on your part to repeat that," returned the coroner impatiently. "Mrs. Reed swears that the pills were the same pills; and she evidently speaks the truth."

"I am sure she thinks she speaks it," replied Abel, gently. "Nevertheless, sir, I assure you she is mistaken. In some way the pills must have been changed while in her possession; box and all."

"Why, man, in what manner, do you suppose, they could have been changed?"

"I don't know, sir. All I do know is, that the pills and the box produced here last week were not, either of them, the pills and the box she had from me. Never a box went out from me, sir, but it had my private mark on it—the mark I spoke of. Jones the constable searched my place while I was detained in the Lock-up, and took away all the pill-boxes out of it. Let him testify whether he found one without the mark."

At this juncture a whole cargo of pill-boxes were shot out of a bag on the table by old Jones, some empty, some filled with pills. The coroner and jury set on to examine them, and found the mark on all, lids and boxes.

"And if you'd be so good as cause the pills to be analysed, sir, they would be found perfectly free from poison," resumed Abel. "They are made from herbs that possess healing properties, not irritant; a poisonous herb, whether poisonous in itself, or one from which poison may be extracted, I never plucked. Believe me, sir, for I am telling the truth; the truth before Heaven."

The coroner said nothing for a minute or two: I think the words impressed him. He began lifting the lid again from one or two of the boxes.

"What are these pills for? All for the same disorder?"

"They were made up for different disorders, sir."

"And pray how do you distinguish them?"

"I cannot distinguish them now. They have been mixed. Even if

returned to me, I should not venture to use them. I have a piece of furniture at home, sir, that I call my Pill-case. It has various drawers in it, each drawer being labelled with the sort of pills kept in it: camomile, dandelion, and so on. Mr. Jones must be able to corroborate this."

Old Jones nodded. He had never seen nothing neater nor more exact in all his life, than the keeping o' them there pills. He, Mr. Jones, had tumbled the drawerfuls indiscriminately into his bag, and so mixed them.

"And they will be so much loss to me," quietly observed Abel. "It does not matter."

"Were you brought up to the medical profession?" cried the coroner—and some of us thought he put the question in irony.

"No, sir," replied Abel, taking it to be serious. "I have learnt the healing art, as supplied by herbs and roots, and I know their value. Herbs will cure sometimes where the regular doctor fails. I have myself cured cases with them that the surgeons could not cure; cases that but for me, under God, might never have been cured in this world. I make no boast of it; anybody else might do as much who had made herbs their study, as I have."

"Are you making a fortune by it?" went on the coroner.

Abel shook his head. "I have a small income of my own, sir, and it is enough for my simple wants. What little money I make by my medicines, and honey, and that—it is not much—I find uses for in other ways. I indulge in a new book now and then; and there are many poor around who need a bit of help sometimes."

"You 'read' the stars, I am told, Abel Carew. What do you read in them?"

"The same that I read, sir, in all other of nature's works: God's wonderful hand. His wisdom, His power, His omnipotent providence."

Perhaps the coroner thought to bring Abel to self-ridicule in his replies: if so, it was a mistake, for he seemed to be getting the worst of it himself. At any rate, he quitted the subject abruptly, brushed his energy up, and began talking to the jury.

The drift of the conversation being, so far as the room could hear it, that Crew's pills, and only Crew's, could have been the authors of the mischief to the two deceased children, whose bodies they were sitting upon, and that Crew must be committed to take his trial for manslaughter. And, committed he would have been in a few minutes longer.

"Hester Reed's evidence is so clear and positive that it quite puts aside any suspicion of the box of pills having been changed ——"

"The box had not my mark upon it, sir," respectfully spoke Abel Crew, his tone anxious.

"Don't interrupt me," rebuked the coroner sharply. "As to the

box not having what he calls his private mark upon it," he went on to the jury, "that in my opinion tells little. Because a man has put a mark on fifty pill-boxes, he is not obliged to have put it on the fifty-first. An unintentional omission is readily made. It appears to me ——"

"Am I in time? Is it all over? Is Abel Crew found guilty?"

This unceremonious interruption to the official speech came from a woman's voice. The door of the room was pushed open with a fling, considerably discomposing those who had their backs against it and were taken unawares, and the room was pushed right and left by the struggles of somebody to get to the front. The coroner looked daggers; old Jones lifted his staff; but the intruder forced her way forward with resolute equanimity. Cathy Reed: we never remembered to call her Parrifer. Cathy in her Sunday-going gown and a pink bonnet.

"How dare you?" cried the coroner. "What do you mean by this? Who are you?"

"I have come rushing over from Tewkesbury to clear Abel Crew," returned Cathy, getting up her breath after the fight. "The pills that killed the children were my pills."

The commotion this avowal caused in the room was beyond describing. The coroner stared, the jury all turned to look at the speaker, the crowd trod upon one another.

"And sorry to my heart I am that it should have been so," went on Cathy. "I loved those two dear little ones as if they were my own, and I'd rather my pills had killed myself. Just look at that, please, Mr. Coroner."

The ease with which Cathy spoke to the official gentleman, the coolness with which she put down a pill-box on the green cloth before him, took the room by surprise. As Ann Dovey remarked later, "She must ha' learnt that there manner in her travels with young Parrifer."

"What is this?" questioned the coroner curtly, picking up the box.

"Perhaps you'll ask Crew whether he knows it or not, sir, afore I say what it is," returned Cathy.

The coroner had opened it. It contained seven pills; just the size of the other pills, and looking exactly like them. On the lid and on the box was the private mark spoken of by Abel Crew.

"That is my box, sir; and these—I am certain of it—are my pills," spoke Abel, earnestly, bending over the shoulder of the topmost juryman to look into the box. "The box and the pills that I gave to Mrs. Reed."

"And so they are, Abel Crew," rejoined Cathy, emphatically. "The week afore last, which I was spending at home, I changed the one pill-box for the other, inadvertent, you see,"—with a nod to the coroner—"and took the wrong box away with me. And I wish both boxes had been in the sea afore I'd done it."

Cathy was ordered to give her account more clearly, and did so. She had been suffering from illness, accompanied by neuralgia, and a doctor at Tewkesbury had prescribed some pills for it, one to be taken occasionally. The chemist who made them up told her they contained arsenic. He was about to write the directions on the box, when Cathy, who was in a desperate hurry, snatched it from him, saying she could not wait for that bother, flung down the money, and departed. This box of pills she had brought with her on her visit to her father's, lest she should find occasion to take one; and she had put it on the shelf of the press, side by side with the other pill-box, to be out of the way of the children. Upon leaving, she took up the wrong box inadvertently: carrying away Abel Crew's pills, leaving hers. There lay the explanation of the mystery of the fatal mistake. Mrs. Reed had not known that Cathy had any pills with her, the girl, who was just as light-headed as ever, not having chanced to mention it: and Cathy had the grace to dust the room herself while she was there.

"When father and his wife sent me word about the death of the two little twins, and that it was some pills of Abel Crew's that had done it, I never once thought o' my pills," added Cathy. "They didn't as much as come into my head. But late last night I had lent to me last Saturday's *Worcester Herald*, and there I read the inquest, and what Crew had said about the marks he put on his pill-boxes, and mother's evidence about never having shifted the pill-box from its place atop o' the press. Sure and I couldn't have changed them boxes, thought I to myself; and upstairs I ran in a fright to look at the box I had brought away. Yes, there it was; Abel Crew's box with the marks on it; and I knew then that I had left my own pills at home, and that they had killed the babies. As soon as I could get away this morning—which was not as soon as I wanted to—I started to come over here. And that's the story—and the blessed truth."

Of course it was the truth. Abel's beautiful face had a glow of light upon it. "I knew I should be cleared in God's good time," he breathed. The Squire pounced upon him, and shook both his hands, as if he'd never let them go again. Duffham held out his.

So that was the end of the story. Cathy got a reprimand from the coroner for her carelessness, and burst into tears in his face.

"And thee come off home, wi' thee,-and see me chuck that there powder into the fire; and don't go making a spectacle o' th' self again," cried Dovey sharply in his wife's ear. "Thee just let me catch thee a bringing in more o' the dratted stuff; that's all."

"I shall never look at a black beedle again, Jack, without shivering," she answered; going in for a slight instalment of the shivering there and then. "It might ha' come to hanging. Leastways that's what I've been a dreaming of."

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

A WORD FOR OUR MILITIA.

EVERY year about a hundred regiments of Militia are called out for twenty-eight days' training. Four or five hundred men, obedient to the annual summons, come from their homes to the different towns selected for this yearly training.

They are all billeted about these towns; two to ten men in a house, not always the most respectable—not always in the most respectable streets; chiefly young men under five-and-twenty.

Is this the only town, and am I the only woman who never thought of doing anything towards their comfort or improvement? I wish I could believe it, but I fear there are numbers of women like myself who, in fact, rather dread the invasion of the Militia; who expect to see them filling the public-houses, and crowding the footpaths when off duty.

For myself, I confess it never occurred to me that I was in any way "my brother's keeper," so far as *they* were concerned, until a friend lent me a little book called "Active Service," written by a friend of Miss Robinson. (It costs one shilling. Pray buy it.)

It tells of what she has done and is doing for our soldiers. Many must have heard her name, and many may remember she was thanked by the officers, after the last Autumn Manœuvres, for the success of her good work. They had never had so little drunkenness among their men. I determined, when our Militia came this spring, I would try to follow in her train, though very far behind, yet to set foot on the same road; and if only *one* young fellow was saved from drinking, should I not have cause to be thankful?

Next year, please God, it will be better done and better organized. This time, as most of the men came from Birmingham, there was a dread of small-pox: nothing was arranged beforehand, and the men had been a week in the town before the room was taken.

The only public-house here where *drink* is not allowed, (where a working-man can go in for an hour and read, have a cheap cup of coffee at any hour, or his bit of meat cooked for him,) has a large upper room, and this was hired. Printed papers were distributed, saying there was a Reading Room for the Militia, open from 11 to 1 o'clock, and from 6 to 9 in the evening. On Tuesday, the 9th June, taking with me, as Miss Robinson advises, writing-paper, envelopes, picture-cards, and stamps, I took a chair at the end of the long room, a little before six, and waited. Many ladies had taken up the idea and helped readily with money, with books and papers, games of chess, draughts, dominoes, and solitaire. The room is a good size and airy; two large windows,

always open. Large texts and maps cover the walls, and the only picture is one of our Queen.

"My noble heart went pit a pat" as I heard steps on the stairs, and two redcoats made their appearance. One, a young fellow about two and-twenty; the other older. I rose and welcomed them, and they took their seats. I followed Miss Robinson as well as I could, showed the writing-materials and picture-cards; asked if they wished to send money home. Young D. said he would come on Friday and send some to his mother; he came almost every day, and on Friday brought two shillings, which I exchanged for stamps, wrote his letter, and enclosed them.

I told them we all hoped they would find the room a comfort. They might write, or read, or amuse themselves quietly; all we required was attention to the rules of the house fastened on the wall, which are, that no noise, swearing, or bad language, and no intoxicating liquors, are allowed. They asked for copy-books, and began to write, after looking at the "Graphic" and other illustrated papers; and D. said how glad he was there was a room to come to; he was not very comfortable at his billet.

Next day more than a dozen men came, two or three in the morning, but the greater number in the evening. Many asked me to write their letters. Those who could write themselves brought the envelopes to be directed, admiring my writing when I had addressed them.

I told them about Miss Robinson. I showed the picture-cards, and said stamps would go between two safely home, and I could give stamps for their money. I was quite pleased when six hot pennies were pulled out. I let them choose the picture-card or the sheet of paper on which their letter was to be written. I had brought paper with wood-cuts of different celebrated places, such as you get at the sea-side, and was always asked not to write on the back of the picture, "as they would like to frame it at home."

I never could stay later than seven, so I told them all to come early when they wanted letters written; sometimes a scribe among them would write for himself or a friend, but in general they all came to me to write to their mother, father, wife, or "the young woman as I'm keeping company with." I think they liked my asking explanation of the different sentences I had to write, such as, "Mind and keep Tommy out of the road."

"Who is Tommy?" I said.

"My little boy; he's over two-and-a-half, and he's always running out and getting in the way of the horses, so I'm telling my wife to keep an eye on him."

And D., writing to his mother, after asking for his sister and her child, "Tell Dick to mind his schooling," (then in parenthesis) "I wish had minded mine more, so that I could write myself now."

"And who is Dick?"

"Dick's a little lad that lives near us, and he's always running into our house when I'm at home," said the young soldier with a smile. Simple words that told their own tale; told that the tall young fellow had in some way won the little lad's love.

"How pleased Dick would be to see you in your red coat," I said. "Suppose we send him a picture-card or a book for himself?" So a monthly part of the "Chatterbox" went directed to Dick Hodges, *Junior*, for fear the said Dick's father, also called Dick, should think it was for *him*. Several letters I wrote that mother: "and please tell her I'm going on all right," was in every one. Mothers' hearts are all the same, and one felt the pleasure those few words would give. He brought me the mother's answers to read, and they ended with, "Thank the lady very much for her kindness from your loving mother."

"Mother's a tidy scholar," he said, "but I never cared for school when I was a little one."

One evening, when the regular comers had got over any awkwardness they might have felt with me at first, a new man arrived, anxious to write to his wife; he could not write himself, and he was shy with me: he wanted Corporal C. to write for him, but Corporal C. was busy writing for a young fellow. Some very interesting document it was evidently. I had to direct the envelope, but it was the corporal brought it to me, not the young fellow himself, and it was to a Miss Mary Watson!

The new arrival was in a hurry, and I was pleased to hear the other men telling him, "Go to the *missus*, she'll write it for you"—"I tell you the *missus* will write it the minute you ask her," &c.; so at last he made his way to my end of the table and told me what to say. He wanted to send his wife some money, which the sergeant would advance him, so, with the letter all ready, and card inside, he went off to the sergeant, thanking me and wishing me good-night.

We ladies had discussed among ourselves whether these men would like one of us among them, or whether they would prefer having the room to themselves; so the second or third day, when there were seven or eight men present, I stopped as I was going away, and told them our doubts. Having Miss Robinson's experience in my mind, I said, *I* thought they would like to be looked after when they were away from their homes, adding, "I have sons of my own, serving the Queen far away from me, and I am thankful for any kindness shown *them*, so, if I can help any of you, I am quite ready and willing." They all said, "We like you to come very much, m'm, and are very much obliged to you."

My constant conversation between the letter writing was on drinking. "Do take your pay home with you," I said; "*don't send it to the devil* before you leave the town."

The little book, "Buy Your Own Cherries," was a great favourite—a twopenny book, with a large bunch of red cherries outside; and "Does

it Answer? A Word to Soldiers," by Miss Robinson's friend, was often read.

Twenty men were from Birmingham, many of them under three-and-twenty. There was never a word spoken that could be found fault with, and the people of the house were loud in their praises. There had been a fear lest a party of Militia might not make the house pleasant to the regular comers in the reading-room below, but they all behaved with the greatest order and civility, staying on till nine o'clock, reading or playing games. I feel sure they will find a hearty welcome next spring, and that when the room is better known, there will be many more anxious to avail themselves of it.

Probably one reason for the good behaviour is, that only the steady fellows come; and I must say for these young men, that not one of them ever came into my presence smoking, which was more than could be said of their superiors in rank, I am quite sure. I know of one town where not only the men for their twenty-eight days, but the recruits for heir *three months*, have been looked after every evening from six to nine for some years, the head of a large shop and her daughters devoting most of their evenings to the work; there are many other voluntary teachers, and numbers of the young fellows have learnt to read and write through their kindness. One year the men presented her with a Bible; they have all as a rule behaved well, and been most grateful to her.

Another year I trust there will be regular management and a regular number of ladies, each taking their turn two or three times a week. They would find plenty to do, for many wanted a reading lesson as well as a writing lesson, after the letters were written and posted. Of course there should be one of a certain age or position to superintend every evening: and some women, who excel with girls or at mothers' meetings, might not be so well fitted as others to speak to or teach young men. For myself, I prefer a set of rough boys to the demurest class of good little girls that ever was found. A mother, with her heart full of her own boy, will say a kind word of advice to a young fellow, and touch the soft place in his heart, better perhaps than anyone else, and perhaps, as no words are forgotten before God, bring a blessing on her own darling,

"Roaming in youth's uncertain wild."

I should be glad to have the subject considered and suggestions offered. All I can say is I tried to do my best in the short time I had. From twelve to one, and from six to seven, was all I could give; and Mrs. B., the widow of a clergyman, accustomed to parish work, came whenever her health allowed her, and she had a Bible class on the two Sundays. The first Sunday there was only young D.; the second, he was there and four others, all young. They were quite interested in the account

of David longing for the cool fresh water from his own well at Bethlehem, and the three brave men breaking through the enemy to bring it. Again following Miss Robinson's example, I talked of the good soldiers in the Bible, and read the beautiful bit about young Asahel, "who was as fleet of foot as a young roe."

It was agreed to give the thirty men who had frequented the room a tea-drinking on the day of the review. And by the way, when I was settling with our baker's wife, and speaking of the men, she told me, two or three years ago, four young militiamen were billeted in the house opposite her. "They used often to buy little things from me," she said, "and no men could have behaved more properly. One was married, and his wife did not like being left at Birmingham alone, so she came with him. She used to ask me to give her a bit of work that she might earn enough to pay her railway fare; so I let her scour out the shop for me. Poor young woman! she wasn't far from being laid up, and wasn't quite fit for that work; but she was so anxious to get a little money together, she would do it, poor thing."

Ah me! I thought, was that all the youngwife deserved from us, whose husband was training for his country's service? Lazarus had been at *my* door, and I knew it not.

Our tea-drinking was announced for half-past six; but, as some of the men could not come before eight, we did not begin till then. All who had arrived early were perfectly quiet and interested whilst I read aloud one of the S. P. C. K. books, "Anne Gale's Story." Four men at the far end of the room left their games, and joined the circle to listen.

There was some pork-pie and some cake for each man; but what they thought most of was some strawberries; and, with a view of impressing my horror of drink, I brought in a large round basket of cherries, and, holding it up for them all to see, I said, "Buy your own cherries, remember." There was a hum of applause, and several men said "The best book that ever was written." Good Mrs. B., with her kind face and white hair, like Mary of old, thinking of the better part, went round saying a word of good counsel to each, and I noticed how quietly and attentively they listened. Several other ladies were present helping in various ways. We had pretty blue Prayer-books for the five who had attended the Bible class, and a story-book for each of the others.

One said, "Please, m'm, if you don't mind, give me 'Our Father's Care,' Mrs. Sewell's ballad, with coloured pictures.

At nine we all sang "God save the Queen," as they must be in their quarters by half-past nine. "Please, m'm," said young D., lingering till the last, "let me have 'Anne Gale's Story' for little Dick, will you?"

I feel certain, by the hearty shake as each man took my hand, that the kind feelings awakened by those evenings in that room will not

soon be forgotten or die away; and I feel certain that such little acts of kindness towards one branch of our noble army (surely due to men training to shed their blood, if need be, for us), is one way of fulfilling the royal law, hitherto among the many, many things left undone that we ought to have done—is one way in which the women of England, in a womanly way, by the all-powerful gentle influence of woman, can help to close the great gulf between the different grades in our great towns.

> "For so the whole round earth is every way
> Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

One way of knitting together the different members into one glorious body, into one fold, under one Shepherd—or rather, one great army, under the one great Captain of our Salvation, who will reward all His faithful soldiers at the last, in the land that is very far off—even that land where there shall be no need to learn war any more.

TO A SEA-SHELL.

THY pink lip has been kissed by ocean spray,
And blooms the brighter for the fond embrace—
How oft repeated he that loves may say—
Whose tender memory time will not efface.
Is not thine ear still filled with the soft grace
Of many a whispered vow and dulcet lay,
Which greeted thee by happy night and day
In the long past; in some far distant place?
Yes, for thy lip is murmuring in thy sleep
The secrets told thee by thy kingly love;
We hear the echo of the mighty deep
If close thy dainty form we bend above:
Can time or space resist the earnest will?
Is not thy dear one's presence with thee still?

EMMA RHODES.

JENNY MORRIS'S VOYAGE.

"WELL, then, there is nothing left for me to do but to go out to California!"

The young lady who had arrived at this sudden determination and thus avowed it, was a pretty girl of twenty-three, or thereabouts, with a graceful, well-developed form, a bright face, and a clear blushing complexion. She stood in the middle of her Aunt Morris's dining-room, with an open letter in her hand, and an expression of annoyance contracting her broad clear brow. Her aunt, who was a timid little woman, with a timid voice, only ventured one remark in reply to this avowed resolution. It was, "Yes." But if ever that monosyllable expressed doubt, astonishment, dismay, and terror, it did so as it dropped slowly from Aunt Morris's trembling lips. The state of the case was this. Jenny Morris and her twin-sister, Elsie, were orphans, to whom this same timid, flurried woman, although an old maid herself, had been as true and efficient an adopted mother as if she had been six feet high, and with the resolution of an Amazon. They lived together in the suburbs of our great city, in a secluded sort of way, being people of a good deal of pride and taste, and not unbounded means. They had a pleasant little circle of friends around them, retiring as they were, and read a great deal about the world, while they saw very little of it.

Between one and two years ago, Jenny Morris had received the first great shock of her life. The sudden blow came from a dear hand—that of her sister Elsie.

They were sitting together one evening, laughing about a large party they had been at the night before, and Jenny was speaking in much disparagement of a young man they had met there; one Mr. Edward West, recently from California.

"And the absurd attention he paid to you, Elsie! I pitied you extremely——"

Something in Elsie's pretty face made her sister pause and start. A blushing smile, a glance, half confused, half proud, met her own, and then Elsie caught her hand and held it to her heart.

"It is not the first time we have met him, by a good many, as you know, Jane. And—and it is quite a week now since it happened; only I could not tell you."

"Since what happened?" asked Jenny, in a dreadful fear—for she guessed it but too well.

Mr. West, who had fallen in love with Elsie Morris, and she with him, had received her promise to become his wife. As the blow, of hearing this, fell upon Jenny, she turned as white as death, and thought she

would rather have died than heard it. For Mr. West was returning to the golden land again, and would want to take Elsie with him. Even so.

That was the bitter drop in the cup, and it made a gloomy shadow fall upon the happy household that not all the wedding preparations and finery could dispel. The day of parting brought pangs those who have not loved and clung to one another for years, as those three simple-minded, warm-hearted women had, can never realize. And the wedding day passed over, and carried away Elsie.

It was over now, and had been for months upon months. Mr. and Mrs. West had sailed for San Francisco, and reached it in safety; but poor Jenny had remained desolate.

The open letter now in her hand seemed to renew the sorrow, and bring back again the heart-breaking scene. Elsie was ill, she wrote—too ill to tell of; and she was frightfully nervous at a time of peril that was approaching. And Mr. West added a sealed scrap to the letter, saying that there were fears for his wife, and she was constantly sobbing for Jenny.

To read of this distress, and not make an effort to help her, was not in Jenny Morris's nature; so after looking at her little aunt's tearfully sympathetic face for a minute or two without speaking, she broke out at last with the sentence above written,—

"Well, then, there's nothing left for me but to go to California!"

Aunt Morris could only look up in feeble distress, with an expression of helpless grief, and then take shelter in her pocket-handkerchief and silent tears.

"Yes," said Jenny, "I know it's terrible; but what is to be done? Poor Elsie must not be left alone in her time of need. Suppose—Aunt Morris, you hear what Edward says—suppose she were to die."

"With all the haste in the world, you would hardly be in time, Jenny."

"Oh, yes I should, aunt. And haste I will make. Elsie wrote, she says, nearly as soon as she knew of it herself. Miss Nevill shall come and stay with you, aunt."

Jenny was looked upon by her aunt and sister as possessing gigantic strength of character and force of will, qualities of which they were both totally destitute. If anything had ever to be decided she decided it at once, with a fiat from which there was no appeal. There was something positively wonderful to them in her determination of manner, and she had gradually come to be considered as full of strange experience of the world, although she had never gone five miles from the place where she was born.

"You know best, dear, of course; but, is not the voyage to California looked upon as a dangerous one?" asked Aunt Morris.

"Why, it has been made by thousands safely, so I can't see how it

can be so. But, to tell you the truth, I know nothing about it; I never thought I should need to; but I'll begin to inform myself of all things without delay."

"You can never go alone, my dear!"

"I *must*, aunt—unless I can find anyone to go with," was Jenny's answer. "Think of Elsie."

"Is there no hope for this?—no turning you, Jenny?"

"None, aunt. To go is an imperative duty."

"Then, my child—oh dear! that I should have to tell you—I do know of someone who is going. And that's Mrs. Webb. I met her the day before that dreadful letter came. She informed me that she was going out there to join her husband."

Jenny's eyes sparkled.

"Oh, aunt, it is the very thing!"

Miss Morris only groaned. It was simply appalling.

Jenny, in the abstract, did not much like Mrs. Webb, but, as an escort to California, she seemed all that could be desired. She was not very much older than Jenny. Mr. Webb had gone out some two years before, had been successful in his speculations there, and she was now about to join him. Jenny put on her things, and went forthwith to Mrs. Webb's house, and found her busy and triumphant.

"Oh, Jenny, it is charming to have you with me as a companion. I thought I should only have old Mr. Bumble. He's very kind and all that, but you know he is like my grandfather."

"Mr. who?" said Jenny.

"Mr. Bumble."

"He must be brother to Charles Dickens's Bumble," cried Jenny, laughing.

"He is going out there about a patent for some mining shaft, and is to take care of me. He takes all the arrangements for me upon himself, and so he will for you; ship, passage, berth, everything. You will have nothing to do but get your outfit."

"I hope—of course—we shall go in the quickest manner possible," said Jenny.

"*Of course*," replied Mrs. Webb, emphatically. "Do you think Mr. Bumble, with all his experience, does not know what he is about, Jenny? You may implicitly trust him for all things.—As I do."

With this comfortable assurance, Jenny Morris went home with a mind at rest. No time was lost over her own preparations. In fact, there was no time to lose; for the ship chosen by Mr. Bumble was to sail at once.

"He is a perfect treasure," said Mrs. Webb. "We need never see the ship at all till we join it."

As the time was so short, they were to go down by rail, and join the ship on her finally sailing from the last port she touched at. Jenny

Morris was terribly low-spirited the night before. the last night of her stay on land; and her aunt saw it.

"No, aunt; I am not afraid of the voyage. It is not that: Mr. Bumble writes word that it will be quite a pleasure trip. And the thought of seeing Elsie again is delightful. But no one can leave their home, and embark for a far-off unknown land, without feeling it."

"Who knows, Jenny, but you will pick up a husband on the voyage?" cried Lucy Elderton, who, with other of Jenny's young friends, had come to see the last of her. "The passengers sometimes are very nice ——"

"*Lucy!*" interrupted Jenny, with the glance of an offended empress. "for goodness' sake don't make me lose my respect for you! How can you be so—so ——"

"So what, Jenny?"

"Well, I was going to say coarse, Lucy. What have you ever seen in me to call up such an idea as that?" All the proprieties of life were sacred to Jenny Morris.

It was on a Saturday morning that Mrs. Webb and Jenny first saw the ship they were to sail by. She was called the *Lightning*. Jenny had passed a sleepless and weeping night, and nothing was left but to embark. Their luggage was already on board.

As they drove along the wharf, Jenny glanced at the piles of warehouses and the hurrying signs of business with the strange wonder one feels when bound on a long voyage, to see home interests speeding along unruffled and unchanged.

"Do you know much about ships, Mrs. Webb?"

"Never saw such a thing in my life, except at a distance," promptly responded that lady. "That is, I never was on board one. When William left for California he came down here to embark, and would not hear of my coming with him. I wish I did know something of them: it would be very comfortable to start with a little experience of sea life."

Jenny sighed, and looked doubtfully at a forest of masts that sprang up before them. The carriage suddenly stopped and turned round for them to alight.

"Oh, never fear," said Mrs. Webb, encouragingly, as she got out. "Mr. Bumble knows enough for both of us."

Mr. Bumble was on board waiting for them; an elderly gentleman with a round, red face.

"This way, my dears, this way," said he, with a most fatherly air. "I dare not get out of the boat, for I've had a job to get it. All the boats are in requisition this morning. Wind's fair, and many ships are going off."

They did not hear what he said in the trouble of getting into the little boat that was to row them to the ship. The ladies were utterly bewildered.

"Good gracious, Jenny!" cried Mrs. Webb, "do you mean to say a thing like this can go all the way to California?"

"Heaven knows," returned her friend, "but if it does I daresay we shall go in it."

Amidst all kinds of bustle and noise they reached the ship. It was a great tall black-looking vessel, up whose side was an impracticable ladder that people were scaling with great haste and disregard to appearances.

"We have not much time to lose," said Mr. Bumble. "The pilot says we are late as it is. Get up, young lady, get up."

"Oh, by all means," cried Jenny, in cheerful desperation; and giving Mrs. Webb an imploring glance to keep close behind her, began to mount the perpendicular ascent with blind courage. It was only a moment or so, though it seemed an age to the two women—and they stood on the deck of the vessel and took breath.

It was a scene of confusion. Ropes and men were everywhere. The shouts from one to another, the rushings about on all sides, the packages and the ropes they bumped against quite bewildered them.

"This way, my dear young friends, this way to your cabins," said good Mr. Bumble.

They gladly followed him. A small door, opening into what seemed a little house on deck, led them into a low room, with doors on each side, and a table in the centre. Towards the other end, near a small window in the wall, sat a gentleman, reading with great calmness, and seemingly at perfect ease. A pleasant-looking man who glanced up at them with a pair of nice grey eyes.

"There are your apartments," said Mr. Bumble, pointing to two doors bearing the respective Nos. 8 and 10 over them; and into them the ladies stepped: and as quickly stepped out again, confronting each other, and uttering the word "Apartments!" in an exclamatory tone of inquiry. Mr. Bumble had gone; and the gentleman sat reading quietly and undisturbed, so there was no one to answer it.

"Do you suppose—does he suppose," asked Mrs. Webb, in a tone of subdued despair, "that any Christian woman could dress herself or go to bed in such a salt-box as that? Why, my elbows touch the wall on either side. I never could get as much as my shoes off without opening the door!"

"Perhaps all the cabins are like this, and we shall have to make the best of it," said Jenny. "You know we promised not to be dismayed at trifles!"

"But who could have imagined it!—and the idea of his calling them apartments!" ejaculated the dismayed Mrs. Webb. Suddenly a bright thought struck her. "Jenny, let me see you go into your box and shut the door; and that will strengthen me to attempt mine."

This feat accomplished, the ladies with something like resignation

began to "make the best" of the places, and arrange their things. In the midst of it Mr. Bumble appeared, an amiable smile on his face.

"We are under weigh," he said, "getting out to sea, and the pilot's going. Would you not like to come on deck and take a last look at the old country?"

They both hastened out with him. In spite of Jenny's efforts at self control, a great swelling lump rose in her throat. Her eyes were hot and full of tears as she looked over the side of the great vessel now in motion, and at the receding land, between which and her the broad blue water began to swell and widen.

Mrs. Webb sank down and covered her face with her hands. "Oh, Jenny," she murmured, "this is indeed the last of home."

"Mr. Bumble," said Jenny, suddenly, a startling thought occurring to her, "there are a great many sails here, but where are the paddle-boxes?—where are the boilers?"

"There are none," replied Mr. Bumble, blandly.

"No paddle-boxes!—no boilers!" cried Jenny. "This is a steamer."

"Oh dear no, my dear young lady. This is not a steamer."

"Not a steamer!" echoed Jenny, starting up in alarm. "Then what in heaven's name is it?"

"It is the fast-sailing clipper ship, *Lightning*."

"Clipper! what is a clipper? Are we going to California, or are we not? Oh, Mr. Bumble, do not trifle with me."

"Trifle with you, my dear Miss Morris! Far be it from me to trifle with you, or any other respected young lady. We are going to California in the fast-sailing clipper, *Lightning*, by way of Cape Horn."

In speaking, afterwards, of the feelings awakened by Mr. Bumble's announcement, Jenny was wont to say that "she thought she should have gone raving mad. A sailing vessel—and round Cape Horn! Why, she might be four—five—ay, six months before they reached San Francisco! If ever they did reach it.

It all came of "trusting to Mr. Bumble." That estimable old gentleman, being given to the love of economy, had not looked out for the fleetest mode of sailing, but for the cheapest. The *Lightning* was a small and very inferior vessel in all ways, quite a third-class one; but her terms for the passage were extremely moderate. It was a frightful blow to Jenny.

Mrs. Webb did not seem to care about the mishap. In point of fact she could not be made to understand it. A month or two, more or less, on board was all the same to her. There was no help for it now; no redress. Mr. Bumble protested he had acted for what he thought the true interests of the ladies as well as his own: and poor Jenny Morris could only forgive him. As she had had to make the best of the little cabin, so she now had to make the best of the ship.

The next time she saw Mr. Bumble, something was decidedly the

matter with him. He was in his own cabin; the door propped back. It opened to the state cabin, and was near her own and Mrs. Webb's. A pale, greenish shade sat on his face, his hands hung limp, his head fell on one side, his eyes looked like those of a fish. Jenny glanced to the stranger, who was still reading quietly, in dismay. He coolly glanced back at her in return, and spoke a single word.

"Sea-sick."

"Oh, my dear young friend, pray come to me!" gasped Mr. Bumble. And Jenny, full of compassion, was hastening to him, when Mrs. Webb's cabin door was burst open with a bang, and that lady, greener in the face than Mr. Bumble, uttered a succession of moans.

"Oh, Jenny, my dear, come to me! Don't leave me, that's all I ask of you."

"Jenny Morris, Jenny Morris," cried that young lady to herself, "don't go crazy; that's all *I* ask of you."

And for the next two or three hours she had a fine time of it, running between the two. The old gentleman was gasping out for his "dear young friend," and for lemons, and hot water and brandy perpetually. Mrs. Webb held her tightly by the arm whenever she could get hold of it, gaspingly imploring of her to "let her die."

Thus the day wore on. Poor Jenny was getting exhausted when the stranger gentleman appeared before her with a cup of tea. "I am sure you must want it," he said.

"Oh, thank you!" cried Jenny, gratefully looking up at him. "I think I did want something. What is it that they are doing in the saloon there?"

"Laying supper. I thought you would like tea best."

"Indeed yes. Supper! But surely nobody will be able to eat!"

"Oh dear yes," he answered. "The captain and some of the passengers will—I for one."

"How is it you are so much at your ease in this rolling ship?"

"I made the voyage over not long ago, and got my sea legs on."

"Made it from California?"

"Yes. And as soon as I have supped, I will take that old gentleman off your hands for a bit. You will have more time to devote to the lady."

Jenny was heartily grateful to him; and by-and-by he came back and entered on the charge. She shut herself in with the other miserable patient—Mrs. Webb; and was bathing her head and fanning her brow, when the gentleman handed in a bowl of broken ice, and two flacons, one of brandy, the other of eau-de-cologne.

"How very kind he is!" thought Jenny.

Shortly afterwards, when Mrs. Webb was lying white and cold and motionless, a message came from Mr. Bumble—"Would she come to him at once?" Hastily crossing the cabin, she entered the little state room

that Mr. Bumble called his. He had caused the upper berth to be removed, and sat upright in the lower one, with a large green gown on, a lemon in one hand, a bottle of lavender-water in the other, and other appliances at reach.

"My dear young friend, where have you been?" he moaned. "This —ah—person is no doubt very kind," indicating the stranger by a motion of the lavender-bottle, "but I am unaccustomed to the services of a male nurse, and—and ——"

The sufferer dropped the lemon, seized Jenny's hand, and held it to his brow, while the rejected nurse stepped respectfully back to make way for her attentions. A low groan floated across from the opposite room, and a weak voice murmured, "Jenny," in accents of harrowing reproach.

"What shall I do!" exclaimed the poor girl, as the plump, elderly hand of Mr. Bumble tightened on her shoulder with a detaining grasp. "Do please go, Mr. ——"

"Dacey," suggested the gentleman.

"Would you please go and put some more ice on Mrs. Webb's head. I will be there as soon as I can."

This state of things continued. Jenny had no rest. Groaning and calls from one cabin; calls and groaning from another. Neither of them would have Mr. Dacey: each was certain to "die" without Jenny.

"You will be worn out," said Mr. Dacey to her.

"I don't mind that, if I can only keep up myself. It serves to keep me from thinking of my vexation. My coming on this vessel and rounding Cape Horn has been an unfortunate mistake. I thought to have gone by the best and fleetest steamer."

"A sailing vessel is the pleasantest if you can spare the additional time."

"Well, the long voyage looks sadly formidable to me. I don't know what I shall do."

"Make the best of it," he said, smiling. "Perhaps I shall be able to help you in some way or other."

"I can only trust to heaven," thought Jenny.

An interminable hour seemed to pass. Mrs. Webb had her this five minutes, Mr. Bumble that. By-and-by the closeness, heat, and strange motion began to act strangely on Jenny. A swimming feeling seized her when she moved; her head throbbed, her eyes were hot and swollen, and she held by the wall to prevent herself from sinking down.

"How does he seem now?" kindly inquired Mr. Dacey at this point.

"I scarcely know," she replied faintly—"I am getting ill myself I fear. Oh, what a miserable state of things! I can hardly stand."

"Don't distress yourself about your father," said her new friend, earnestly. "I will do everything possible to make him comfortable; and your friend over there, too. Lie down at once and leave them to me."

"He is not my father!" whispered Jenny, falling into a seat.

"Not your father!" cried Mr. Dacey, in astonishment. "Oh I beg your pardon. I took up the impression that he was. Perhaps he is your uncle."

"No, he is nothing—to me. He is—Mrs. Webb's old friend."

Jenny spoke in a gasping kind of way. Her companion's surprise melted away into a quiet determination.

"Why, then," he exclaimed, "this is almost more than one could expect, my aged friend"—with a nod towards the green gentleman. "I shall be obliged to give you a little different treatment. Don't worry yourself about *either* of them," he added in an earnest tone to Jenny. "You go and lie down, and trust to me."

Jenny took the advice: and lay as still as she could during what seemed the most endless, wretched night she had ever known. Her deserted aunt, her expectant and disappointed sister, rose like staring ghosts before her again and again, every time more distractingly real; till, conscious of the fearful distance that was hourly swelling between them, she groaned in hopelessness and despair.

Morning came at last, and she rose with a wretched feeling in head and heart, and holding by the sides of her room—for the ship was heaving wildly—strove to make herself presentable, and hide as much as possible the tears she had been shedding. On reaching Mrs. Webb's room, she found that lady plunged into a state of hopeless apathy that startled her.

"Jenny, I came for your sake. If I die, bear my last words to William," was all that she murmured.

"Came for my sake!" thought Jenny. "Why surely her mind is wandering. She was coming herself before ever I was. But there's all the more need for me to do what I can for her."

Partly forgetting her misery in soothing the pillow of the one who had in idea so sacrificed herself for her, Jenny waited tenderly on her friend and made her as easy as was possible. One great thing was, that she herself was not so very ill. During the morning she was a witness of what appeared to be a conflict between the stranger and Mr. Bumble on the subject of a large tumbler of mustard and water. A mysterious gleam of enlivenment stole into the shadows of Jenny's mind as she watched the younger man resolutely follow the dodging head of his venerable charge, and finally penning it in the far corner of his berth, by main force pour the mixture down his throat. Gulpings, sputterings, and gaspings reached her ears, followed by cries for help and cries against such barbarity.

"Will you have some tea, miss?" asked the cabin boy.

"Yes; thank you," answered Jenny, almost cheerfully. "I think I could drink a cup. But I will give one to this sick lady first."

Mrs. Webb took it without hope, but without complaint; assuring Jenny

as she swallowed it, that she "blamed her for nothing: it was all over: but just to point out to William the spot in the sea where she was laid, and she would forgive the rest." Sitting down to her own tea with this on her conscience, and a general sense of loathing in her soul, Jenny's prospect of breakfasting was rather weak. A succession of something like brays broke upon her ear, followed by stifled expletives about "murder" and "poison" and "death at your door," which she discovered were the reproaches of Mr. Bumble to the stranger for the strong remedy he had administered.

In the course of a day or two, Jenny made acquaintance with the rest of the passengers. There were not many. Two French women, dark, thin, and cheerless looking, who never appeared without shawls, and the husband of one of them. A fat missionary clergyman named Blair; and a lady who called herself Madame Freep, but who was unmistakably English; and just as unmistakably *not* a lady. A large, black eyed, loud woman, who had not been ill at all, and who astonished the company by her extravagant dress—frilled petticoats, flounced gowns, ribbons, laces, and gorgeous jackets, all something wonderful to behold in the cabin of the *Lightning*. Jenny, she knew not why, instinctively shrunk from her—but Madame Freep was gracious in manner to everybody. Especially to the captain's brother—one Mr. Perkins: a seedy, rakish looking man, whom she seemed to have known before. Captain Perkins, though sufficiently civil, was silent and unsociable.

The days went on. Jenny and Mr. Dacey very much improved their acquaintance with one another. And by degrees Mrs. Webb and Mr. Bumble got over their mal de mer, and joined the circle; the latter first, for Mr. Dacey's mustard and water had really done him a world of good. But Mrs. Webb made much of her invalid state; indeed she was weak.

One morning when the sea was calm and blue, and the bright sunlight lay on it in patches, Mrs. Webb appeared on deck, shawls and cushions and all kinds of comfortable appliances borne before her by Mr. Dacey. For some little time she sat amid them like a piled-up caravan; and then she began to talk. To Jenny's astonishment and Mr. Dacey's private amusement, she quite ignored her past indisposition, and spoke rapturously of the "beauties of the ocean."

"For," she said, "although Jenny Morris has suffered a great deal, and I somewhat, I confess, though chiefly through anxiety for her, yet we must acknowledge that a sea voyage is something to be enjoyed; something to be positively revelled in."

"To be sure it is," replied Madame Freep, with a gushing air. "We do not give in to trifles. What is a day's squeamishness, more or less? We can bear it, I hope, Mrs. Webb. To whatever extent others may quail, you and I, my dear madam, can laugh at it."

"So we can," said Mrs. Webb, with a slight cough. She was immensely taken with Madame Freep and her grandeur.

"But," added Madame, turning to Jenny—who was staring at Mrs. Webb with wide-eyed surprise, "tell me about your friend, Miss Morris."

"Which friend?" asked Jenny.

"He who has just gone aft—Mr. Dacey. How long have you known him? Is he a cousin?"

"Known him!" echoed Jenny; "I never saw him in my life till we came on board this ship."

"Not know him before? Good heavens! Well, then, let me tell you—I am sure it has all arisen from your inexperience, my dear Miss Morris—that you and he are *too* intimate for strangers. I took you to be cousins, at least. It is quite improper."

Now, of all words in the wide range of language, that one conveyed the most ominous sound to Jenny's ears. Improper! Her spirit sunk before it; and being for the moment convinced that she had sinned against society, by innocently making friends with Mr. Dacey, she stood like a criminal, blushing, and looking a great deal too pretty to be pleasing to Madame.

Mrs. Webb, feeling herself in some degree responsible for Jenny's good behaviour, took up the grievance, reproaching Jenny in severe terms.

"He has been so very kind to me—to all of us," spoke Jenny at length, remembering all he had done. "I shall ever feel grateful to him."

"I am ashamed of you, Jenny Morris!" cried the scandalised Mrs. Webb. "He can't be a gentleman. If he were, he would not have thrust his company upon you when I was lying ill."

Jenny's good sense came to her. "I think it is all a fuss for nothing," she said. "What have I done—or what has Mr. Dacey done?"

"It seems to me the young lady is infatuated with Mr. Dacey," ill-naturedly spoke Mrs. Freep.

"Decidedly so," interrupted old Bumble, who was standing by. And Jenny at the moment hated him cordially.

Mr. Dacey came towards her as she sat, her face flushing indignantly, and her heart swelling beyond the possibility of quiet utterance. She returned his bow hastily, and, brushing past him, entered the cabin and shut herself in her own little room.

"Oh, Elsie, Elsie," she cried, apostrophizing her distant sister, "why did you ever marry Edward West, and then get ill! Oh, that I should ever live to be told that I was improper and infatuated!—and by a stupid, lumpy-headed old man, too!" It seemed really too much, and Jenny hid her head in her little berth and sobbed with all her heart.

The object of Mrs. Webb's censure, meanwhile, approached that lady in a polite-manner, in which suavity and quiet self-assurance mingled.

"You are looking brighter and brighter every hour, Mrs. Webb. Oh, this sea air is invigorating! And you, Mr. Bumble, I have not seen you before this morning. How are you?"

"Quite well," replied that amiable old man. "And so hungry! It's a great shame that there are no apples on board. I have been asking and find there are none. Of all things, I should like a nice apple or two."

"Why, really this seems fortunate," said Mr. Dacey. "There are no apples, I believe, on board, but a friend packed a barrel for me, which he assured me would keep well. I shall be most happy to supply you."

"I'm sure you are very good, sir," said old Bumble, rubbing his hands, for he was a gourmand.

Mrs. Webb was another. Her mouth began to water, and she said she could manage to eat an apple if it were baked. Amidst other omissions, Mr. Bumble had not put any private stores of delicacies on board for himself or for the two ladies.

Mr. Dacey caused some apples to be baked: and out of these refreshing cooked apples, a little breeze sprung up between Mrs. Webb and Jenny. Mrs. Webb was in her cabin, with an apple in a saucer, sprinkling some sugar on it before eating, when Jenny chanced to look in.

"What fine large apples!" she exclaimed. "I hope they will have some for dinner."

"No," said Mrs. Webb; "these were brought by Mr. Dacey. There are none on the ship, but his."

"What, did Mr. Dacey presume to offer you baked apples?" cried Jenny, pretending to look aghast. "But how came you to encourage his impertinence by receiving them?"

"Don't be nonsensical, Jenny," said Mrs. Webb, severely. "I am not a married woman of three or four years standing to be taught my duty by a girl like you. Thank heaven I can distinguish between sensible actions and silly attentions; and others might profit, if they wish to learn discretion from my example."

"Mrs. Webb, what do you mean? I have seen Mr. Dacey hold your head and bathe it with ice-water, and do everything in a man's power to be of use to you; and if those are silly attentions, and baked apples serious favours, it is beyond me to understand it."

"Jenny Morris, if you are going to be impertinent, I shall wash my hands of you. Be so good as leave me to myself, and shut my cabin-door."

Jenny retired: and taking some sewing, went out and found a seat on deck, hoping the fresh sea-breeze would clear her mind and blow the clouds away. At a little distance from her sat the large, overdressed lady, with the two Frenchwomen at her side. They were paying

assiduous court to her grandeur by admiring a brilliantly embroidered opera-cloak, which was thrown over her shoulders.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Miss Morris!" she said, blandly. "And how are you by this time, my dear?"

Jenny smiled, bowed her acknowledgments, but felt altogether too miserable to speak. Spreading her work on her lap, she was soon busy at it; and the others moved away.

"I am glad to see you able to think of yourself for a moment," said a voice at her side. It was Mr. Dacey's, and he leant over her with a book in his hand and an expression of thoughtful kindness in his face and manner.

"Bless me," thought Jenny, as she looked up when he spoke, "he *is* dreadfully young. As Mrs. Webb said to me, it's not the same thing as though he were a Mr. Bumble. I never thought about it before—but I'm sure he can't be more than five or six-and-twenty. And he is very good-looking too!—and as Mrs. Webb says, appearances must be all against me."

"I hope I have not offended you, Miss Morris. You are very silent."

"Oh, no indeed; I was just recalling how kind you have been, and how much you had relieved the misery of those two dreary weeks."

"I should like, without disclaiming the credit of the little you make so much of, to be always able to serve you in any way that may be possible, although it seems to offend Mrs. Webb and Madame Freep."

He had overheard, then! Jenny's face was in a painful glow. And yet he had lavished his apples upon them!

"May I say a word of warning to you, dear Miss Morris."

"Oh yes."

"Have as little to do as possible with that bedizened woman. I have my reasons for saying this. Had I a sister on board, she should not go within a yard of her."

"How can I help it?" asked Jenny. "I do not like her myself."

"You cannot entirely help it; I am aware of that. Had you a husband or father here he could take care of you. But—be as little with her as possible."

"Thank you," said Jenny.

The next day, Mrs. Webb having entirely recovered her serenity, remarked to Mr. Bumble, as they all sat together on deck, that "Mr. Dacey had some very delightful candied fruit, which he promised to bring to the table at dinner."

"He is a thoughtful young man, and deserves some credit," replied Mr. Bumble, while Jenny said nothing. The candied fruits were eaten, and a day or two more produced some Indian pickles, that were likewise disposed of; and in the ensuing fortnight several bottles of

cherry cordial: some sardines and boxes of figs and dates, followed in their wake. Indeed it seemed that Mr. Dacey had a most liberal private supply of good things.

But, in the course of time, so largely were these stores called upon for the public benefit, they came to an end. And with them came an end to Mr. Dacey's popularity.

The next to produce good things from private lockers, was Madame Freep. Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Webb paid more court to her than ever, deserting everybody else: Jenny sewed away at certain mysterious little packages of work she had purchased for Elsie, keeping herself very much alone. Mr. Dacey wandered up and down, looked into the sea, read, talked to Mr. Bumble, or played chess with the Frenchman.

One day as they sat together, Mrs. Webb, after clearing her throat once or twice, began, "My dear Jenny, may I ask why you act so morosely towards Mr. Dacey? I daresay you have hurt the young man's feelings, and he must certainly have some more of that delightful candied pineapple. I have a reason for thinking he *has*. If you did not mind asking him, my dear, I am sure he would be quite charmed to oblige you—and—and give us some."

"I have been forced to impose so much on Mr. Dacey's kindness," Jenny answered, her voice trembling as she strove to be calm, "that I should be sorry to increase the obligation by any such request. It would be very foolish."

"Foolish! what do you mean, you young Solomon?" exclaimed Mrs. Webb, talking loud and angrily. "Positively I consider you the most contrary girl I ever met. Here we are on a desolate voyage, where every little comfort we can get is needed to make it agreeable, and which Mr. Bumble and myself have struggled unceasingly to obtain, and yet you set up and tell me that the first effort that is required of you is foolish."

"Mr. Bumble should have seen that proper comforts were sent on board for us," replied Jenny.

"I am ashamed of you, Jenny Morris," said Mrs. Webb, virtuously indignant. "The poor dear old man has done his best."

Madame Freep approached; a silver knife in one hand, a pot of guava jelly in the other. "Just try this, dear Mrs. Webb," she said, smilingly. "It is so good! And I have a bottle of lemon syrup at your service, if you will accept it."

Jenny gathered up her work and moved away. She had not forgotten Mr. Dacey's caution. By-and-by, Mrs. Webb turned into Jenny's cabin, with the lemon syrup and a loose morning jacket all ribbons and rucheings, which she had borrowed of Madame Freep as a pattern for one for herself.

"I want you to help me cut it out, Jenny," said she. "Is it not beautiful?"

"It is very gay," was Jenny's answer. "But, Mrs. Webb, I wish to ask you to consider a little. Mr. Dacey particularly advised us to have nothing to do with this lady; who is, one may easily see, vulgarly overdressed, entirely uneducated, and—not nice in any way. Of course she is kind to offer you all these good things: but the receiving them from her establishes an intimacy that I am sure you will not wish to maintain long, and may be sorry for later."

Mrs. Webb listened coolly, and then opened the bottle of lemon syrup and mixed some with a glass of water. After a sip or two, she spoke calmly but severely. "Would your highly respected aunt, Jenny, who has been to you as a mother, believe that any man, not to mention a suspicious and ill-provided stranger (this was an allusion to the sudden collapse of his supply of dainties), could influence her erring niece in the short space of one month, as Mr. Dacey is influencing you?" Jenny bit her lips. "Even to the extent of falsifying and blackening the character of an elevated and generous woman?"

"But listen," cried Jenny, who was determined not to lose her temper, "just listen to reason. On the one hand is a little privation, hard to bear I allow, for the ship's provisions are not what they ought to be: but on the other is the necessity of being indebted to a strange and undesirable person—one whom perhaps Mr. Webb will not approve of."

"Now," exclaimed the virtuous wife of that absent gentleman, "now you have struck your last blow. Trying to make trouble between man and wife is a fitting end for these outer influences and base insinuations. Jane Morris, I defy you to poison Mr. Webb's mind against me, his loyal wife. My character, Miss Morris, is above your touch."

At this point Jenny burst out of the room and slammed the door. "We shall have a quarrel," she said, "I feel that we shall quarrel. I've slammed the door upon her, and that is a good step towards it. Oh, good heavens, that I should ever go round the Horn to California and fight all the way there?"

Affairs from that moment took a decided turn. Madame Freep, who seemed to have acquired undisputed power on board, and to wield it imperiously, ruling everybody to her own will — Madame Freep set her face against Jenny. Mr. Bumble bowed, smiled, and simpered to her, and received cup custards and potted meats in return; Mrs. Webb was her devoted admirer and fared likewise; but Jenny and Mr. Dacey, the first reserved, the last indifferent, were entirely overlooked. Jenny began to be treated with marked coldness, and when on deck would often overhear herself to be the object of most unpleasant and annoying remarks, especially from Madame Freep and Mrs. Webb. It dismayed her almost to fear. Even Mr. Bumble hardly condescended to speak to her.

One evening when it was intensely hot and the ship almost be-

calmed, Jenny wrapped a veil round her head and stole out for a moment, for the pure air on deck, before going to bed. Looking into the saloon, she saw the table occupied by a large card party, over which Madame Freep presided like one in her element: as she really was. Halting close to the bulwarks of the ship, Jenny leant her head against the rigging, and was surprised to hear voices just beyond; surprised because she had thought everybody was at cards. "I am sorry to be obliged to speak out plainly," said a voice she well knew, "but you force me to it by affecting not to understand me. I must say that your conduct is intolerable in exposing two respectable ladies to the society of a woman like that."

"My young friend,"—it was Mr. Bumble who replied—"you are really a little too warm. This lady, to whom you have taken so unaccountable an objection, is a very admirable person, very. She is under the escort and protection of the captain's brother."

"Well, by heavens, this is really too much. I will not stand by—I swear to you, I will not stand by and see that innocent young lady insulted by her. No; not if I have to unmask the Jezebel for it."

"Now compose yourself," gently interposed Mr. Bumble, as he disengaged his coat from the other's grasp. "That young woman, who has as much pride in her as Lucifer or the fallen angels, can take care of herself. She has acted a most ungrateful part to Mrs. Webb. Dear Mrs. Webb, at the earnest entreaties of the Morris family, took charge of the troublesome girl, and this is the result! I assure you she deeply regrets it."

Jenny's annoyance caused her to start, and she caught the eye of Mr. Dacey. His hand was clapped, not very gently, on old Bumble's lips. And Jenny, in her too hasty efforts to get away, fell over a coil of rope that lay on the deck, her foot somehow twisting itself amidst it. Mr. Dacey ran to raise her. Her ankle was hurt, and was in intense pain. Seating her on a stool that had been left out, he went to the saloon. Jenny overheard every word that passed there.

"Fallen down on deck and hurt her ankle!" repeated Mrs. Webb in answer to his hurried words, and his request that she should come.

"What a sad termination to a moonlight meeting!" exclaimed Madame Freep, with irony.

"Will you come out at once, and see to Miss Morris?" cried Mr. Dacey sharply to Mrs. Webb.

"Well, really, I hardly know about it," returned that lady, rising slowly and unwillingly. "If young persons in the position of Jenny Morris will be so indecently imprudent as to prowl the deck at night with gentlemen ——"

Jenny forgot her injured ankle in the insult, and rose up alone. "Stand aside," she cried to Mrs. Webb in a storm of indignation, "you should not put a finger on me, madam, though I died in another

instant without your aid. You are a false, unkind woman; yes, I dare to tell you so: and Heaven hears me say it."

Mr. Dacey, his whole frame heaving with anger and pity, caught the hapless girl and bore her to her cabin. Her poor face was scarlet with shame, and the scalding tears of distress began to trickle down.

"I shall attend upon you myself, Jenny," said Mr. Dacey, calling her by her Christian name for the first time.

"I wish it might be—but you know it must not," she answered amid her blinding tears.

"Listen, Jenny," said Mr. Dacey, standing before her with his arms folded. "It has been my intention for some time past not to lose sight of you until I could hand you over to your sister and Mr. West. They are my very good friends."

"Your friends!" exclaimed Jenny in amazement.

"Yes. And it was your likeness to Mrs. West that first attracted me to you. I have been cherishing a presumptuous hope, Jenny—that you will sometime be my wife. Oh, hear me, my darling, for I am serious. *I think that time has now come.* And I love you with my whole heart. You need a protector."

What did Jenny Morris say? Never a word. She was too bewildered. Too bewildered even to box his ears when he kissed her. But it took a long time to convince her that his arguments held reason, and they disputed it out. She, being a woman, had to yield, of course.

"Jenny, my life and soul," he fervently said, when it came to an end, "if I do not repay you for this by being a devoted husband, never trust me again. Mr. Blair is not the man I should have selected to make us one. But he's a minister of the Gospel, for all that, and we can't pick and choose under present circumstances. I think he may be trusted to keep the secret.

An hour later, when the ship was quiet and lights were put out in the private berths, the Rev. Mr. Blair went into the captain's state room. The captain was there waiting for him, and also Mr. Dacey and Jenny. A short ceremony was gone through, and then the party separately dispersed.

It was nearly a fortnight before Jenny walked on deck again. During that time neither Mrs. Webb nor Mr. Bumble ever approached her to inquire about her sprained ankle or offer her any aid. It was a fact, and a disgraceful one. Madame Freep incensed them both against her; and they were entirely under Madame's dominion—for her sweets and other good things did not come to an end. Madame had, in fact, cast an admiring eye on the only good-looking man on board, Francis Dacey: and—there's a saying of Shakespeare's or somebody's, "Hell has no fury like a woman scorned."

Jenny, who did not seem to be made utterly miserable by the

general neglect, was sitting one day on deck, her foot on a rest. Mr. Dacey was reading to her. She and he seemed to be very good friends; but there was really nothing in the conduct of either that their enemies could make a mountain of. On this morning, however, he so far forgot his good manners as to call her "my dear," and Mrs. Webb overheard it. Up rose that lady with a sniff and a groan; cast a look of horror upon them, and sailed away from their contaminating presence.

Jenny's face was all aglow. She rose in excitement, and would have called back Mrs. Webb.

"Oh, Frank, pray tell her! I cannot endure that she should—oh, what shall I do?"

"Do!" exclaimed Mr. Dacey, coolly, "why, do nothing. Let people mind their own business, if they can."

That was impossible in Mrs. Webb's case, for she immediately called a meeting of her coadjutors, and represented the case. Poor Jenny! what glances met her at table! Madame Freep's was the worst: she seemed bent upon humiliating the distressed girl. And what might have come of it, or what Mr. Dacey might have done, cannot be known; for there broke out a violent storm that startled all other troubles away.

It was a terrible storm, a frightful, perilous gale: and it seemed to evince every disposition to stay and see the party round Cape Horn. Oh! how the wild wind howled through the bare rigging, and the black sea swelled to meet the leaden sky. No sun appeared for days—nothing to brighten the wide ocean but the foam that capped the waves. The cold and the ice were terrible. It seemed to be a fight for life. Only those who have rounded the Horn can know what it is. Private feuds lost their force in these dreary, short, cold days; nothing seemed of importance except exact latitude and longitude, and the supposed distance from the Cape.

At last there came a day when the desolate peaks of Staten Land rose like a group of ghastly giants from an ocean-grave before them, and then a good wind was announced. It seemed fierce and cold enough to them all, but it blew them round into the Pacific bravely. With a storm or two that sprang upon them like the angry remonstrance of that mighty ocean, they came up nobly with the beneficent trade-winds to aid them, and things began to go on smoothly again. So smoothly that the persecution of Jenny recommenced, and was setting in pretty vigorously when it received another check in this wise.

They had been sailing for three long months, and more, and had never seen another ship; so when one was sighted, it caused quite a commotion. The *Lightning* was short of certain of her provisions, and it was hoped this ship might help them to some.

She proved to be an American craft, the *Eliza Jones*, also bound

San Francisco. The *Eliza Jones* was also short of stores; and she sent a boat off to the *Lightning* with two men in her.

They came on board, and they had much to tell of shortness of provisions and absence of comfort on their own vessel; averring that they had chiefly lived lately upon fruit—of which they had an abundance.

Now fruit was the very thing especially wanted on the *Lightning:* but tins of meat, which the *Eliza Jones* lacked, were there in abundance. An exchange was arranged. Tins and biscuit were given to the strangers, and one of the *Lightning's* boats, with a man or two in her and also Mr. Dacey, put off to the *Eliza Jones* to bring back the fruit. Sitting on the deck an hour afterwards, it struck Jenny that the sea was rising. She spoke of it to the first mate.

"Why yes, Miss Morris, it is," was the reply. "If it goes on that boat won't be able to come back again."

With a strange throbbing at the heart, Jenny sprang up and peered anxiously in the direction where the *Eliza Jones* had been. It was gone now, entirely gone; the tumultuous waves hid it: and the sea was getting worse with every minute. Somebody coolly said in her hearing that they had parted with the boat for good.

"Good heavens!" thought Jenny. "What shall I do?"

There was one thing before her, and she did it. Into her cabin she shut herself, and cried and prayed by turns. In her terror she feared that they might start to return, and not finding the ship, go beating about till they were lost. This almost deprived her of reason, and she spent a night in which she thought the misery of a lifetime was crowded. At daybreak, looking out, she heard some sailors laughing on the deck at the sudden change in quarters of their two shipmates. Their tones reassured her; they never mentioned danger, and she, as unconcernedly as she could, enquired of them whether they feared any.

"Danger! not a bit on't," was the rough and hearty answer.

Keeping up a quiet exterior, Jenny went in to breakfast as usual, and found, to her infinite surprise, looks of sympathy and condolence on every face. Mrs. Webb spoke to her for the first time since the night on which she had sprained her ankle. Her tone was not free from mild reproach, but it was studiously kind. "Take this chair, Miss Morris," she remarked, in the manner of one bestowing a boon; "and steward, bring Miss Morris some nice strong tea."

Mr. Bumble added to her consternation by dividing a slice of toast and handing it to her with a sigh.

But Madame Freep was the most ardent in her solicitude. "Take a little fish, young lady; you'd better eat what you can. I'm sure you need all you can get, for a miserable ship isn't the place to get the delicacies you should have."

This was remarkably reassuring, and Jenny received it with inward surprise and outward dignity: but when it transpired, as it presently did, that this sympathy was lavished on her in consideration of her heartless desertion by that deceiving wretch, Dacey,—indignation and laughter struggled for mastery in Jenny's face. The latter gained the day, and she broke out into a merry peal that rang in the saloon.

"Of course it was a planned thing," said Mrs. Webb; "a deep laid plot to get away from you, Jenny. Now that we are nearing San Francisco, he might be afraid that you would hold him to his attentions."

Another merry peal of laughter from Jenny. The ladies decided by private signs among themselves that it was "put on."

"Hysterics, poor thing," said Mrs. Webb, nodding confidentially. "I can feel for her as a Christian should, without regard to the past."

Day after day passed by, and the *Lightning* sailed on and on; but it was never crossed or overtaken by the *Eliza Jones*. They had been voyaging on the stormy deep for nearly four of the longest months Jenny had ever known, when something occurred to Madame Freep of a really startling nature. She had been gradually becoming nervous and irritable for some time past, and had followed the captain's brother on deck, and walked and talked to him there in an excited way.

One afternoon she left him in dreadful anger after an interview of this kind, and hurrying down the companion-way, past where Jenny and Mrs. Webb were sitting, cursed him loudly and in terrible language, as a deceitful villain. That night she took rather too much wine and worked herself into a fury. Mrs. Webb took refuge from the dreadful scene in Jenny's room. "Who would have thought it," she cried, "oh, who would have thought it? And yet do you know, Jenny, I remember warning Mr. Bumble, after we got to an end of that Muscat wine she had, that she seemed one to be doubted. Old Bumble is not as attentive to me as he might be, and he would not listen."

Disturbance reigned all night. Madame Freep, maddened and enraged, paraded the saloon with a pistol in her hand, like a female pirate, threatening to shoot Mr. Perkins. Daylight and unconsciousness overcame her valour, and she tumbled down in a heap during the scene of her valiant outbreaks. She was carried to her room; from whence she issued no more until the Golden Gate was entered and San Francisco lay in sight. What a breathless company gathered on deck to view it, as a bright sunshiny December morning disclosed it to their eyes! Jenny neither spoke nor moved. Her eyes were fixed on a boat that slowly approached them as they lay anchored out in the bay. It neared, came alongside, and bounding from it up the side of the vessel came two gentlemen, who scarcely had the grace to wait and assist a lady who accompanied them, and who was apparently as eager as they. At last she reached the deck and Jenny's arms the same instant. "Elsie,

Elsie, Elsie," was all that young lady could say, and straightway she fainted, as an appropriate ending to her voyage.

"Oh Jenny, love," cried her sister, "don't faint now! We have so much to tell you; and here is Mr. Dacey, who is Edward's best friend; and I want to introduce him to you."

Well, that really seemed a consideration of some weight with Jenny, for she immediately opened her eyes and sat up, leaning her head on her sister's shoulder. They were in the cabin, and Mrs. Webb was of the party; labouring assiduously to show her tender zeal, and to see what was going on.

"Your sister has seen me before," said Mr. Dacey. "There is no need of ceremony between us. In fact—she is my wife. Owing to the kind offices of Mrs. Webb and Mr. Bumble, to both of whom I shall always be the most grateful man alive, I found it necessary to interfere for Miss Morris's protection on board, and—the Reverend Mr. Blair married us in the presence of the captain."

"William Webb," screamed the lady alluded to, as a mild-looking man came glowering in and went peering round for someone. "William Webb, what have I not borne for your sake?" and sank upon his breast.

Mrs. West stood transfixed, as did her husband. Jenny, pale and abashed, allowed her proud young husband to link her arm within his.

"Married!" cried Mrs. West, when she found breath to speak. "Married on board this dreadful little ship! Oh! Jenny, what did you wear and who were your bridesmaids?"

"But how did you get *here?*" gasped Jenny to her husband.

"In the *Eliza Jones*. We made the Golden Gate last night."

"Come home," exclaimed Mr. West. "That's the only practical idea now. Come home, and let us try to think it out."

Down they got into the boat, and home they went in the carriage waiting for them. As they were alighting from it a remembrance struck Jenny.

"What on earth did I come to California for? And where's your illness gone, Elsie?"

Elsie laughed. "Why you see, Jenny, that imploring letter of mine was written ever so many months ago. And—here's the baby. Is he not a beauty?"

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cried Jenny, bewildered. "I need never have come, after all. Or done what I did do in coming."

"Don't apologise, Jenny," laughed Mr. Dacey. "Human nature at sea is not human nature on shore."

A SAILOR'S WOOING.

A Welsh Sketch. By Anne Beale.

"DEET to goodness, Shon *bach*, I cannot be marrying in such a hurry," said Nanno to her lover.

"Take me or leave me. Now or never. I'm off to sea again on Monday, and the *Mary Ann* won't wait," said ardent Jack—or as he was more mellifluously called amongst his native mountains, Shon Peregrine.

"Monday! I can't have my gown made by then! And what's to become of me when you're gone?"

Shon pushed his blue cap thoughtfully aside.

"You can stop on in your place. I shall be mate when I come back, and will get you a jolly little berth."

"When I marry I mean to be independent," said Nanno. "No more service for me."

"Your 'ladies' are as good as gold, Nanno."

"True for you, Shon," said Nanno, tossing her head proudly. "But when I marry I shall be my own mistress."

"Then you'd better take Morris Typicca. He's soft enough for anybody, and don't mind waiting. I do."

"Maybe I had. He's steady and 'ouldn't be saying 'now or never.' And he do keep a pretty little farm."

"Name o' goodness, marry him to-morrow, girl. I'm not the chap to stand in your way. God bless you all the same."

Shon took Nanno unexpectedly in his arms, gave her the hug of an affectionate bear, and was gone.

"Shon! Shon!" screamed Nanno—but the fine, black-eyed, blue clad lover did not return.

Nanno ran after him; in vain. She sat down under the trysting-tree, and began to cry her eyes out. The bright, coquettish, trimly-attired damsel gave herself up to temporary despair. But ladies-in-waiting have no time for desperation. Mistresses, however amiable, must be attended to, and the word "Nanno! Nanno!" resounded across the lawn. Stifling a sob and moistening a snow-white apron with brine, she ran into the house, as she had come out of it, by the back door.

Nanno was an orphan and a beauty, and, as such, she had resolved to make her own fortune. It was too provoking that just as she was accomplishing this end, her old playmate should have returned from sea, and so boisterously fallen in love with her. And he, only a sailor in a merchant vessel, while Morris Typicca was a well-to-do young farmer.

"He'll be back again on Sunday!" thought Nanno, as she sponged her eyes and put on a fresh apron.

But Shon Peregrine did not return; neither did he write. Indeed, he had told her that he hated writing, and seldom sent a letter, even to his mother. But he sent her his savings, which was, perhaps, more satisfactory.

Many comments were made on Nanno's red eyes; for no sooner were the lids recovering their whiteness than they inflamed again; and suggestions not altogether pleasant were also made concerning Shon's infidelity. She thrust them back with, "As if I'd be marrying a sailor!" and consoled herself with Morris Typicca, when she was assured that the *Mary Ann* had left Cardiff docks for the "World's End." She somewhat entangled in her mind this debateable spot with the Land's End, which she had heard at school "wasn't so far."

"Why aren't you marrying, girl? 'Tis time you were making a home for yourself, and you an orphan! There's Morris Typicca waiting these two years," said her friends.

"I'm not wanting to marry. I like my situation best," was her reply.

But Morris Typicca pressed his suit, and Nanno, like many another girl, was perplexed in her mind. The truth was that she could not forget Shon. Whenever a storm shook the giant oaks of the surrounding woods, and growled and groaned amongst the hills, her spirit was on the sea, with brave, gallant, loving Shon. And he was always on the brink of a watery grave; always wrecked or wretched; always thinking of her. Women are sadly vain, and flatter themselves their lovers are constant when their hearts are literally "at sea." And inconstant, coquettish Nanno quite believed in Shon's constancy, albeit she was in continual ferment over the addresses of Morris Typicca, and other admiring swains.

But as three years went by, and no Shon appeared, her confidence diminished, and she began to credit the maliciously repeated assertions of Morris Typicca, that "As for those sailors, they have a wife everywhere;" a ubiquity that Nanno did not understand.

However, the hour arrived that comes to most of us, when she must decide her own fate. What a supreme hour it is, and what an unlucky decision we often make.

"You must say 'Yes' or 'No,' Nanno," said Morris Typicca. "I'll not be waiting any longer. My little house is ready, and we'll have a 'Bidding' to furnish it up, and you can take to the dairy now that Molly is leaving, and I shalln't be wanting to get another dairy-maid."

It will be seen that Morris Typicca was of thrifty mind.

"I thought you were wanting a wife and not a dairy-maid. Why, man, I'm parlour-maid here! But I'll be making up my mind by next Sunday," said Nanno.

She was a religious girl, and never went to bed without saying her prayers—so that night she knelt long in the moonlight, asking for

direction from the Father of the fatherless. When she got into bed she had a dream. Of course, she dreamed of the sea and a ship, for she generally did—but this was a peculiar dream. She saw Shon standing on the top of a tall mast, just like one of the acrobats at the travelling circus. The ship was rocking and rolling about like mad on big waves, and she was standing at the bottom of the mast, entreating Shon to descend. Just as she was stretching out her arms, in the agony of —nightmare, and he appeared to be about to jump into them, she awoke. But the dream decided her. Be it understood that she was sadly superstitious, and believed in all sorts of omens, in spite of the superior teaching of her ladies. Either Shon was dead and that was his spirit, or Shon was alive and coming back to her. How she worked out this contradictory problem I cannot say; but in either case, she was not going to be a dairy-maid, and so she told Morris Typicca. They had a stormy interview, which ended in her lover walking surlily one way and leaving her to return home alone. This was the first Sunday evening she had ever walked back from church or chapel unescorted, and it made her melancholy; although she was glad at heart to be rid of Morris Typicca.

"I wonder if it was his ghost?" she said with a shudder, as shadows flitted before her beneath the great trees, and she quickened her steps.

"Nanno!" said a voice.

She shrieked. It *was* his ghost.

"Nanno! Nanno!" was repeated, and she shrieked again. What a huge ghost it was! In another moment it was at her side, and she saw that it had a gold band round its cap.

"Are you married, Nanno?" it asked, in a great, deep voice.

"No! No!" she cried, and fainted from terror.

When she recovered, she was in the arms of this very substantial ghost, who was kissing her emphatically. It sounds very improper, but we daily hear of equally strange spiritual manifestations.

"Are you dead? Did you fall from the mast?" she asked, in perturbation.

"On the contrary, I'm at the top of the tree. I'm first mate, and shall be cap'en soon, and come home to marry you. Now or never."

It was Shon in the flesh; handsome Shon, actually in uniform, with splendid gold lace and gold buttons. Nanno was dazzled, and scarcely knew which to admire most, the eyes or the trappings. But she laid her pretty head shily on Shon's breast, and gave him to understand that she had never forgotten him, though she had only just dismissed Morris Typicca. He laughed a laugh that echoed through the woods.

"Bravo, Nanno! Then we'll be married at once. To-morrow or Tuesday at latest. Come and tell the ladies."

This was rapid work, but Nanno had had one lesson, and remem-

bered that it was "Take me or leave me; now or never;" so she obeyed.

"Impossible," said the ladies.

"Thursday at latest," cried Shon. "I'm going in for my master's examination Friday."

Monday morning he was off by train.

"How slow she is. I'd run the *Mary Ann* against her," he exclaimed.

Still she, the train—why are all fast things feminine?—conveyed him eight miles in less than three quarters of an hour, stopping at every intermediate station. No sooner did they reach the market-town than he ran breathlessly up the steep hill—half a mile at least—till he reached a large house at the summit. He rang a big bell at the gates imperatively, and when a smart maid appeared, said,

"Is Dr. Matthias at home?"

"No, sir; he's gone out for the day, and won't be back till to-morrow morning."

Shon uttered a very impatient word; yet was not indifferent to the "sir," which was due to his handsome face and smart uniform.

"Good morning, miss," he said, politely, and ran down the hill again towards the station, muttering, "If I can't get it here, I can elsewhere. Parsons are never in their ship."

"Next train for Carmarthen?" he asked, when he arrived.

"Train just gone, sir. Another at 2.30."

Poor Shon used a naughty word, and began to pace the platform as if it were deck. He managed to console himself, nevertheless, with what he still called a "noggin" of ale, or so, until the appointed time; then tumbled into the train. He reached Carmarthen in about an hour, then took another running walk in double quick step, up and down hill and through many streets, till he arrived at a comfortable vicarage house, and again rang imperatively.

"Parson at home?"

"No, sir; gone to a clerical meeting. Won't be back till late."

"Dash my buttons if it ain't enough to worry a whale," cried Shon, rushing back to the station.

He was more fortunate this time, for a train was about to start.

"Llanelly?" he cried, frantically.

"Yes, sir. Change at ——"

"Never mind where. When are you off?"

"Directly, sir. Quick."

In rolled Shon. It was between five and six when they arrived at Llanelly. Here he was at home, for there were docks and shipping. But what were they to him at that supreme moment?

"Here mate! sixpence—a shilling to show me where the parson lives," he cried to a sailor lad.

"Which of 'em, cap'en?"

"Him as licenses!"

"That aint parson, but magistrate."

"Do as you're bid and show me the vicarage."

Once more in clerical quarters, Shon tossed the lad a shilling, and would have rung a third time imperatively, but there was no bell. He gave a heavy postman's double knock instead.

"Vicar at home, Miss?" he whispered, for his heart had grown faint with disappointment.

"No, sir. He's just gone out to dinner."

"Where? I'll fetch him."

"Impossible, sir. 'Tis a party in the country."

Shon was guilty of an oath, followed by, "Davy Jones himself 'ouldn't bear this."

But there was no redress. He had nothing more to do but to return crestfallen to Nanno.

"Can't wait after Thursday," he repeated.

"Impossible!" still said the ladies.

The next morning, Tuesday, he carried off Nanno, in spite of remonstrance, to the market-town. He caused such a whirlwind that the ladies believed the trees would fall. And they were so fond of Nanno that they were at their wits' end to know what was best for her. But a first mate! Captain Peregrine by courtesy!

Shon took Nanno, blushing a shower of roses, to the principal shop.

"Prettiest silk gown you've got, Mr. Thomas," he said.

"Yes, sir. Well to be sure—it isn't—it is—it isn't, Shon, of the *Mary Ann?*" said Mr. Thomas.

"Yes, but it is!" laughed Shon, shaking hands. "That's a fine silk, Nanno *fach*," pointing to a fabric of brilliant rose-colour, dotted with amber sprigs.

"I like this best," whispered Nanno, indicating shily a neat silver-grey.

"That's the sail-cloth, then!" cried Shon, and the wedding-dress was bought.

"Before the banns!" breathed Nanno. "And it takes three weeks for banns! What will people say?"

"That you are the prettiest girl in Wales—or Liverpool," replied Shon. "Now for the ring—no: we'll go to the parson first. I just want to speak to him."

Up the hill again, but not so fast as the previous day. Shon was too proud of his pretty Nanno to hurry her. The smart maid was an acquaintance of Nanno's, and was surprised and slightly scandalized to see her arm-in-arm with the gentleman in uniform of the previous day.

"I'll stay with Marget, Shon, while you go in," said Nanno, when they heard that the Doctor was at home.

"Deet, you'll come with me," said Shon, and they were conducted to the vicar.

"I want a marriage license, sir," said Shon.

"A what, Shon?" said puzzled Nanno.

"A guinea's worth to let us be married Thursday," said Shon, and procured it, with the clerical blessing.

"I shall never have my dress!" said Nanno, as soon as they left the vicarage. "And then to be married by license!"

"Ah! but you must! Come along to Miss Lewis, dressmaker."

They went, and Miss Lewis, like the ladies, said "Impossible."

"Come you, Miss Lewis *fach*," said Shon, with his winning smile, which displayed a wonderful set of white teeth, "I'll pay double: but we must have it to-morrow night."

"A dress in less than twenty-four hours! Impossible."

"Let all hands haul in and you'll do it!" said Shon, taking leave. "Now, Nanno, last and least, the little bit o' gold wire."

"It certainly is 'Now or never,'" thought Nanno.

Blushing hurricanes of roses, Nanno was taken to the jeweller's, who being used to such matters, took no notice. It was pretty to see Shon's big, brown hands tenderly manipulating the "bit o' gold wire," and Nanno hiding, or reflecting her blushes, in the glass case whence it was taken.

"I've got a ring I made out of a nugget on purpose for you, Nanno *fach*. It will do for a keeper," said Shon.

"Go you away, while I buy my bonnet," whispered Nanno.

"I'll just be standing outside," replied Shon.

So the wedding gear was bought Tuesday, and, to the amazement of everybody, was sent home Wednesday night.

"What time we lose over our trousseaux," said the ladies.

"And déjeûners," they might have added, for they improvised the most perfect little breakfast in no time, at which they presided at ten o'clock on Thursday.

Before noon of that eventful day, Shon and Nanno were man and wife, and before midnight they were in Liverpool. In a few days he passed his examination for master, and became Captain Peregrine the following week, a command having been given him: and Nanno assumed the title of Mrs. Captain Peregrine, together with the motto of "Happy's the wooing that's not long a-doing."

YEARS AFTER.

I never loved him ; for awhile
We two were passing friends ; and yet
I learned to prize the slow, sad smile
Which touched his features when we met,

His words of greeting, light and brief,
The clasp his fingers left on mine,
And saw, with vague, unspoken grief,
The signs which marked his life's decline.

And when, awaiting certain doom,
He lay at last, serene and calm,
I often sought his lonesome room,
With flowers and words of friendly balm;

And when I bathed his aching brow,
Or read, or talked—still, all the while,
His earnest eyes—they haunt me now—
Repaid me with that slow, sad smile.

At last, one day, when gathering shades
Made the spring landscape chill and drear.
He said, "Dear friend, the sunshine fades;
To-morrow I shall not be here.

"And when you come, you will not see
This trembling hand, this thinning face,
So—you were always kind to me—
Grant me, I pray, one gift of grace.

"I cannot reach you where you stand,
Come closer, while I say good-bye,
Nay, closer—let me hold your hand,
And kiss you once before I die."

Ah, why that sudden storm of tears?
I did not love him—wherefore then
Would I have given all my years
To bring him back to life again?

And when, next morn, beside the door,
I waited in the soft May rain,
They told me he had gone before,
And I had culled my flowers in vain.

Ah, why, when half a score of years
Across his low, green grave have moved,
Do I bedew with bitter tears
The grave of one I never loved?

We were but casual friends, at best;
A word, a smile, and all was said;
I stood not near his heart, nor guessed
That I should grieve if he were dead.

And yet, if on the earth there be
One soul that holds me half so dear
As his last blessing is to me,
Or his sad memory, year by year,

It will be all I ask or crave,
To smooth my bed or bless my sleep,
Even though the whisper haunt my grave,
"I did not love her—wherefore weep?"

A. HOPKINS. J. SWAIN.

IN THE SHRUBBERY AT PINCOTE.

THE ARGOSY.

OCTOBER 1, 1874.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

CHAPTER XXX.

MISS CULPEPPER SPEAKS HER MIND.

MRS. McDERMOT had reached Pincote, and she did not fail to let everyone know it. As the Squire had predicted, the moment she had taken off her waterproof and changed her boots she marched straight into the library and asked for her money. It was with a feeling of profound satisfaction that her brother unlocked his bureau and handed her a roll of notes representing five thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds. She counted the notes over twice, slowly and carefully.

"What are the seven hundred and fifty pounds for?" she asked.

"Interest for three years at five per cent. per annum."

"I thought you would have got me seven per cent. at the least," she said ungraciously. "My man of business tells me that seven is quite a common thing now-a-days. He says that he can get me nine or ten per cent. on real property without any difficulty."

"I should advise you to be careful what you are about," said the Squire gravely. "Big profits, big risks: little profits, little risks."

"I know perfectly well what I'm doing," said Mrs. McDermot with a toss of her antiquated curls. "It's you slow sleepy country folk who crawl behind the times and miss half the golden chances that come to people who keep their eyes wide open."

The Squire shook his head but said no more. He groaned in spirit when he thought what his "golden chance" had done for him.

"Let her buy her experience as I've bought mine," he said to himself. "From a girl she was always pig-headed: let her pay for it."

"Have you any idea how long your aunt is likely to stay?" he asked Jane a day or two later.

"No idea whatever, papa. If the quantity of her luggage is anything to go by, I should say that her stay is likely to be a long one."

"I hope not, with all my heart," sighed the Squire.

Mrs. McDermot, in truth, was not a lady who ever troubled herself to make her presence agreeable to those with whom she might be staying. Consideration for the comfort of others was a thought that never entered her mind. From the day of her arrival at Pincote she began to interfere with the existing arrangements of the house; finding fault with everything; changing this, altering the other, and evidently determined to have her own way in all. The first thing she did was to find fault with her bedroom, although it was one of the pleasantest apartments in the house, and had been especially arranged by Jane herself with a view to her aunt's comfort. But it was not the best bedroom—the state bedroom—therefore Mrs. McDermot would have none of it. Into the state bedroom, a gloomy apartment fronting the north, which was never used above once or twice in half a dozen years, she migrated at once with all her belongings. Her next act, she being without a maid of her own at the time, was to induct one of the Pincote servants into that office, taking her altogether from her proper duties and not permitting her to do a stroke of work for anyone but herself. Then she talked her brother into allowing the dinner hour to be altered from six to half-past seven; so that, as the Squire grumbled to himself, the cloth was hardly removed before it was time to go to bed. Then the Squire must never appear at dinner without a dress coat and a white tie—articles which, of late years, he had been tacitly allowed to dispense with when dining en famille. A white cravat especially was to him an abomination. He never could tie the knot properly, and after crumpling three or four, and throwing them across the room in a rage, Jane's services would generally have to be called into requisition as a last resource.

One other infliction there was which the Squire found it very difficult to bear patiently. After dinner, when there was no particular company at Pincote, it was an understood thing that the Squire should have the dining-room to himself for half an hour in order that he might enjoy the post-prandial snooze which long custom had made almost a necessity with him. But this was an arrangement that failed to meet with the approbation of Mrs. McDermot: she insisted that the Squire should either accompany the ladies, or, otherwise, she herself would keep him company in the dining-room; and woe be to him if he dared so much as close an eye for five seconds! It was, "Where are your manners, sir? I'm thoroughly ashamed of you;" or else, "Falling asleep, sir, in the presence of a lady? a clodhopper could do no more than that!" till the Squire felt as if his life were being slowly tormented out of him.

Nor did Jane fail to come in for a share of her aunt's strictures. Mrs. McDermot evidently looked upon her as little more than a child.

Firstly, her hair was not arranged in accordance with her aunt's ideas of propriety in such matters, which, truth to say, belonged to a somewhat antiquated school. Then the girl was altogether too bright and sunny-looking, with her bows of ribbon and bits of lace showing daintily here and there. And she was too forward in introducing topics of conversation at meal-times, instead of allowing the introduction of appropriate themes to come from her elders and her betters. Then Jane was addicted to the heinous offence of laughing too heartily, and too often. Altogether her aunt saw in her much that stood in need of reformation. Jane bore everything with a sort of good-humoured indifference. "The time to speak is not come yet. I will see how much further she will go," she said to herself. But when the cook came to her one morning and said: "If you please, miss, Mrs. Dermot says that for the future I am to take my dinner orders from her," then Jane thought that the time to speak was drawing very near indeed.

"Do as Mrs. McDermot tells you," she said quietly to the astonished cook.

"Well, I never! I thought that the mistress had more spirit than that," said the woman as she went back to her duties in the kitchen.

Next day brought the coachman. "Beg pardon, miss," he said, with a touch of his hair; "but Mrs. McDermot have given orders that the brougham and grey mare is to be ready for her every afternoon at three o'clock to the minute. I am to take the order, miss, I suppose?"

"Quite right, John, till I give you orders to the contrary."

Next came the gardener. "Very sorry, miss, but I shall have to give notice—I shall really."

"Why, what's amiss now, Gibson?"

"It's all Mrs. McDermot, miss; begging your pardon for saying so. Why will she pretend to understand gardening better than me that has been at it, man and boy, for fifty year? Why will she come finding fault with this, that, and the other, in a way that neither the Squire nor you, miss, ever thinks of doing? And she not only finds fault, but gives orders, ridiculous orders, about things she knows nothing of. I can't stand it, miss, I really can't."

"Mrs. McDermot will give you no more orders, Gibson, after to-day. You can go back to your work with an easy mind."

Jane waited till next morning, and then having ascertained that her aunt had again given orders to the cook respecting dinner, she walked straight into the breakfast-room where she knew that she should find Mrs. McDermot alone, and busy with her correspondence—for she was a great letter writer at that hour of the morning.

"What a noisy girl you are," she said crossly, as her niece drew up a chair and sat down beside her. "I was just writing a few lines to

dear Lady Clark when you came in in your usual brusque way and put all my ideas to flight."

"They must be poor, timid, little ideas, aunt, to be so easily frightened away," said Jane.

"Jane, there has been a flippant tone about you for the last day or two that I don't at all approve of. Flippancy in young people is easily acquired, but difficult to get rid of. The sooner you get rid of yours the better I shall be pleased."

Jane rose from her chair and swept Mrs. McDermot a stately curtsey. "Is it not almost time, aunt," she said quietly, "that you gave up treating me, and talking to me, as if I were a child?"

"If you are no longer a child in years, you are still very childish in many of your ways."

"You are quite epigrammatic this morning, aunt."

"Don't be impertinent, young lady."

"I have no intention of being impertinent. But I have come to see you about the order for dinner which you gave the cook half an hour ago."

"What about that?" asked Mrs. McDermot snappishly. "In what way does it concern you?"

"It concerns me very materially indeed," answered Jane. "You have ordered several things for dinner that papa does not care about; some, in fact, that he never eats. Fried soles, for instance, and veal cutlets—articles he never touches. So I have told the cook to supplement your order with some turbot and a boiled fowl à la marquise. I have also told her that for the future she will receive from me every evening the menu for next day. Should my list contain nothing that you care about, the cook has orders to obtain specially for you any articles that you may wish to have."

"Upon my word! what next?" was all that Mrs. McDermot could gasp out at the moment, so overcome was she with rage and surprise.

"This next," said Jane. "From to-day the dinner hour will be altered back to six o'clock. Half-past seven suits neither papa nor me. Should the latter hour be a necessity with you, you can always have your dinner served at that time in your own room. But papa and I will dine at six."

"I shall talk to your papa about this, and ascertain from his own lips whether I am to be dictated to and insulted by a chit like you."

"That is just what I must forbid you to do," said Jane. "Papa's health has not been what it ought to be for a long time past. Only a few weeks ago he had a slight stroke. Happily he soon recovered from it, but Dr. Davidson says that all exciting topics must be kept carefully from him. You know how little things will often excite him; and if you begin to worry him about any petty differences that may arise between you and me, you will do so at your peril, and must be satisfied to take whatever consequences may arise from your so doing."

Mrs. McDermot stared at her niece in open-mouthed wonder.

"Perhaps you have something more to say to me," she gasped out.

"Yes, several things. Before ordering the brougham to be at your beck and call every day at three o'clock, it might, perhaps, be just as well to make sure that your brother is not likely to want it. He has taken to using it rather frequently of late."

"Oh, indeed; I'll make due inquiry," was all that Mrs. McDermot could find to say.

"And if I were you, I wouldn't go quite so often into the greenhouses, or near the men at work in the garden."

"Anything else, Miss Culpepper? You may as well finish the list while you are about it."

"Simply this: that after dinner papa must be left to himself for an hour. He is used to have a little sleep at such times, and he cannot do without it. This is most imperative."

"I was never so insulted in the whole course of my life."

"Then your life must have been a very fortunate one. There is no intention to insult you, aunt, as your own common sense will tell you when you come to think calmly over all that I have said. You are here as papa's guest, and both he and I will do our best to make you comfortable. But there can be only one mistress at Pincote, and that mistress, at present, is your niece, Jane Culpepper."

And before Mrs. McDermot could find another word to say, Jane had bent over her, kissed her, and swept from the room.

For two days Mrs. McDermot dined in solitary state, at half-past seven, in her own room. But she found it so utterly wretched to have no one to talk to but her maid, that on the third day her resolution failed her; and when six o'clock came round she found herself in the dining-room, sitting next her brother, with something of the feeling of a school-girl who has been whipped and forgiven.

Her manner towards her brother and her niece was very frigid and stand-offish for several days to come. Towards the Squire she imperceptibly thawed, and the old familiar intimacy was gradually resumed between them. But between herself and Jane there was something—a restraint, a coldness—which no time could altogether remove. It was impossible for the older woman to forget that she had been worsted in the encounter with her niece. Could she have seen some great misfortune, some heavy trouble, fall upon Jane, she could then have afforded to forgive her, but hardly otherwise.

It was with a sense of intense relief that Squire Culpepper handed over to his sister the five thousand pounds that he was indebted to her. It was a great weight off his mind, and although he did not say much to Tom Bristow about it, he was none the less grateful in his secret heart. He was still as much at a loss as ever to understand by what occult means Tom had been able to raise the mortgage of six thousand

pounds on Prior's Croft. He had hinted more than once that he should like to know the secret by means of which a result so remarkable had been achieved, but to all such hints Tom seemed utterly impervious.

Still more surprised was the Squire when, a few days after the six thousand pounds had been put into his hands, Tom came to him and said: "With regard to Prior's Croft, sir. You have taken my advice once in the matter: perhaps you won't object to take it a second time."

"What is it, Bristow, what is it?" said the Squire, graciously. "I shall be glad to listen to anything you may have to say."

"What I want you to do, sir," said Tom, "is to have some plans at once drawn up, and have the foundations laid of a number of houses—twenty to thirty at the least—on Prior's Croft."

"I thought you crazy about the mortgage," said the Squire, with a twinkle in his eye. "Are you quite sure you are not crazy now?"

"I am just as sane now as I was then."

"But to build houses on Prior's Croft! Why, nobody would ever live in them. The place is altogether out of the way."

"That has nothing whatever to do with the question. If you will only take my advice, sir, you will get the foundations down without an hour's unnecessary delay."

"And where should I be at the end of a month, when the contractor came to me for the first instalment of his money?"

"All that can be arranged for without difficulty. Your credit is sound in the market, and that is the one thing indispensable."

"But what is to be the ultimate result of all these mysterious proceedings?"

"Now you get me in a corner. But I must again crave your indulgence, and ask you to let the mystery remain a mystery a little while longer. If you have sufficient faith in me, why, take my advice. If not—you will simply be missing a chance of making an odd thousand or so."

"And that is what I can by no means afford to do," said the Squire with emphasis.

The result was that a week later some forty or fifty men were busily at work cutting the turf and digging the foundations for the score of grand new villas which Mr. Culpepper had decided on building at Prior's Croft.

Everybody's verdict was that the Squire must be mad. New villas, indeed! Why there were hardly people enough in sleepy old Duxley to occupy the houses that fell vacant as the older inhabitants died off.

"That may be," said the Squire, when this plea was urged on his notice; "but I mean to make my villas so handsome, so commodious,

and so healthy, that a lot of the old rattletrap dens will at once be deserted, and I shall not have house-room for half the people who will want to become my tenants." So spoke the Squire, putting a brave face on the matter, but really as much in the dark as anyone.

But if there was one person more puzzled than another, that person was certainly Mr. Cope the banker. He had ascertained for a fact that within a few days of their interview—their very painful interview, he termed it so himself—his quondam friend had actually become the purchaser of Prior's Croft; and what was a still greater marvel, had actually paid down two thousand pounds in hard cash for it! And now the town's talk was of nothing but the grand villas which the Squire was going to build on his new purchase. Mr. Cope could hardly credit it all till he went and saw with his own eyes the men hard at work. Still, it was altogether incomprehensible to him. Could the Squire have merely been playing him a trick; have only been testing the strength of his friendship, when he came to him to borrow the five thousand pounds? No, that could hardly be; else why had his balance at the bank been allowed to dwindle to a mere nothing? Besides which, he knew from words that the Squire had let drop at different times, that he must have been speculating heavily. Could it be possible that his speculations had, after all, proved successful? If not, how account for this sudden flood of prosperity? For several days Mr. Cope failed to enjoy his dinner in the hearty way that was habitual with him: for several nights Mr. Cope's sleep failed to refresh him as it usually did.

Although the Squire's heaviest burden had been lifted off his mind with the payment of his sister's money, he had by no means forgotten the loss of his daughter's dowry. And now that his mind was easy on one point, this lesser trouble began to assume a magnitude that it had not possessed before. He could not get rid of the thought that there was nothing but his own frail life between his daughter and all but absolute penury. A few hundred pounds Jane would undoubtedly have, but what would that be to a young lady brought up as she had been brought up? "Not enough," as the Squire put it in his homely way, "to find her in bread-and-cheese and cotton gowns."

But what was to be done? Life assurance was out of the question. He was too old and too infirm. There was nothing much to be got out of the estate. It was true that he might thin the timber a little and make a few hundreds that way; but the heir-at-law had too shrewd an eye to his own ultimate interests to allow very much to be done in that line. Besides which, the Squire himself could not for very shame have impaired what was the chief beauty of the Pincote property—its magnificent array of timber.

There was, perhaps, a little cheeseparing to be done in the way of cutting down domestic expenses. A couple of servants might be

dispensed with indoors. The under gardener and the stable boy might be sent about their business. The grey mare and the brougham might be disposed of. The wine merchant's bill might be lightened a little; and fewer coals, perhaps, might be burnt in winter—and that was nearly all.

But even such reductions as these, trifling though they were, could not be made secretly—could not be made, in fact, without becoming the talk of the whole neighbourhood; and if there was one thing the Squire detested more than another it was having his private affairs challenged and discussed by other people. And what, after all, would the saving amount to? How many years of such petty economy would be needed to scrape together even as much as one fourth of the sum he had lost by his mad speculations? It was all a muddle, as he said to himself; and his brain seemed getting hopelessly muddled, too, with asking the same questions over and over again, and still finding himself as far from a satisfactory answer as ever.

There was one thing that he could do, and one only, that had about it any real basis of satisfaction. He could sell that piece of ground which has already been spoken of as not forming part of the entailed estate—the piece of ground on which his new mansion was to have been built. Land, just now, was fetching good prices. Yes, he would certainly sell Knockley Holt, and fund in Jenny's name whatever money it might fetch—not that it would command a very high price, being but a poor piece of land, as everybody knew. Still it would be a nest egg, though only a little one, for a rainy day.

CHAPTER XXXI.

KNOCKLEY HOLT.

About this time Tom Bristow found himself very often at Pincote. The Squire would have him there. It seemed as if he could not do without Tom's society. Since the loss of his money he had been getting more and more disinclined either for going out himself or having company at Pincote. Still he could not altogether do without somebody to talk to now and then; and Tom being either a good listener or a lively talker, as occasion might require, and having already rendered the Squire an important service, it seemed somehow to fall into the natural order of things that he should be invited three or four times a week to dine at Pincote. Nor after Mrs. McDermot's arrival was he there less frequently. Not that the Squire did not find his sister very lively company. In fact, he often found her too lively. She had too much to say: her tongue was never quiet. In season and out of season, she overwhelmed her brother with an unending flow of small talk and petty gossip about things that had little or no interest for him;

but about which he was obliged to feign an interest, unless, as he himself expressed it, he wanted to know "the length of his sister's tongue."

But when Tom was there the case was different. He acted as a sort of buffer between Mrs. McDermot and the Squire. By means of a few adroit questions, and a clever assumption of ignorance with regard to whatever topic Mrs. McDermot might be dilating on, he generally succeeded in drawing the full torrent of her conversation on his own devoted head, thereby affording the Squire a breathing space for which he was truly grateful. Sometimes, but not very often, Tom let the demon of mischief get the master of him. On such occasions he would lead Mrs. McDermot on by one artful question after another till she began to contradict herself and eat her own words, and ended by floundering helplessly in a sort of mental quagmire, and so relapsing into sulky silence, with a dim sense upon her that she had somehow been coaxed into making an exhibition of herself by that demure-looking young scamp of a Bristow, who seemed hand and glove with both her brother and her niece after a fashion that she neither liked nor understood.

Yet was the love of hearing herself talk so ingrained in Mrs. McDermot's nature, that by the time of Tom's next visit to Pincote she was ready to fall into the same trap again, had he been inclined to lead her on.

"Who is that young Bristow that you and Jane make such a pet of?" she asked her brother one day. "I don't seem to recollect any family of that name hereabouts."

"Pet, indeed! Nobody makes a pet of him, as you call it," growled the Squire. "He's the son of the doctor who attended poor Charlotte in her last illness. He's a sharp young fellow who has got his head screwed on the right way, and he's been useful to me in one or two business matters, and may be so again; so there's no harm in asking him to dinner now and then."

"Now and then with you seems to mean three or four times a week," sneered Mrs. McDermot.

"And what if it does?" retorted the Squire. "As long as I can call the house my own, I'll ask anybody I like to dinner, and as often as I like."

"Only if I were you, I wouldn't forget that I'd a daughter who was just at a marriageable age."

"Nor a sister who wouldn't object to a husband number two," chuckled the Squire. "Why not set your cap at young Bristow, eh, Fanny? You might do worse. He's young and not bad looking, and if he has no money of his own, he's just the right sort to look well after yours."

Mrs. McDermot fanned herself indignantly. "You never were very

refined, Titus," she said; "but you certainly get coarser every time I see you."

Mr. Culpepper only chuckled to himself, and poked the fire vigorously.

"I'll have that young Bristow out of this house before I'm three weeks older!" vowed the widow to herself. "The way he and Jane carry on together is simply disgusting, and yet that poor weak brother of mine can't see it."

From that day forth she took to watching Tom and Jane more particularly than she had done before. Not satisfied with watching them herself, she induced her maid Emma to act as a spy on their actions. With her assistance, Mrs. McDermot was not long in gathering sufficient evidence to warrant her, as she thought, in seeking a private interview with her brother on the subject. "And high time too," she said grimly to herself. "That minx of a Jane is carrying on a fine game under the rose. The arrant little flirt! And as for that young Bristow—of course it's Jane's money that he's after. Titus must be as blind as a bat, or he would have seen it all long ago. I've no patience with him—none!"

Having worked herself up to the requisite pitch, downstairs she bounced and burst into the Squire's private room—commonly called his study. She burst into the room, but halted suddenly the moment she had crossed the threshold. The Squire was there, but not alone. Tom Bristow was with him. The two were in deep consultation—so much she could see at a glance—bending towards each other over the little table, and speaking, as it seemed to her, almost in a whisper. The Squire turned with a gesture of impatience at the opening of the door. "Oh, is that you, Fanny?" he said. "I'll see you presently; I'm busy with Mr. Bristow, just now."

She went out without a word, but her face flushed deeply, and an evil look came into her eyes. "That's the way you treat your only sister, Mr. Titus Culpepper, is it?" she muttered under her breath. "Not a penny of my money shall ever come to you or yours."

Tom had walked over to Pincote that morning to see the Squire respecting the building going on at Prior's Croft. When their conference had come to an end, said the Squire to Tom: "You know that scrubby bit of ground of mine—Knockley Holt?"

Tom started. "Yes, I know it very well," he said. "It is rather singular that you should be the first to speak about it; because it was partly about that very piece of ground that I am here this morning to see you."

"Aye—aye—how's that?" said the Squire, suddenly brightening up from the apathy that had begun to creep over him so often of late.

"Why, it doesn't seem to be of much use to you, and I thought that perhaps you wouldn't mind letting me have a lease of it."

The Squire laughed heartily: a thing he had not done for several weeks. "And I had just made up my mind to sell it, and was going to ask your advice about it!"

Tom's face flushed suddenly. "And do you really think of selling Knockley Holt?" he asked, with his keen bright eyes bent on the Squire's face more keenly than usual.

"Of course I think of selling it, or I shouldn't have said what I have said. As things have gone with me, the money would be more useful to me than the land is ever likely to be. It won't fetch much I know, but then I didn't give much for it, and whoever may get it won't have much of a bargain."

"Perhaps you wouldn't object to have me for a purchaser?"

"You! You buy Knockley Holt? Why, man alive, you must know that I should want money down, and ——. But I needn't say more about it."

"If you choose to sell Knockley Holt to me, I will give you twelve hundred pounds for it, cash down."

The Squire was getting into the way of not being astonished at anything that Tom might say, but he did look across at him for a moment or two in blank amazement.

"Well, you are a rum fish, and no mistake!" were his first words. "And pray, my young shaver, how come you to be possessed of twelve hundred pounds?"

"Oh, I'm worth a little more than twelve hundred pounds," said Tom with a smile. "Why, only the other week I cleared a thousand by one little stroke in cotton."

"Well done, young one!" said the Squire heartily. "You are not such a fool as you look. And now take an old man's advice. Don't speculate any more. Fortune has given you one little slice of her cake. Don't tempt her again. Be content with what you've got, and speculate no more."

"At any rate, I won't forget your advice, sir," said Tom. "I wonder," he added to himself, "what he would think and say if he knew that it was by speculation, pure and simple, that I earn my bread and cheese."

"And so you would really like to buy Knockley Holt, eh?"

"I should indeed, if you are determined to sell it."

"Oh, I shall sell it, sure enough. But may I ask what you intend to do with it when you have got it?"

"Ah, sir, that is just one of those questions which you must not ask me," said Tom laughingly. "If I buy it, it will be entirely on speculation. It may turn out a dismal failure: it may prove to be a big success."

"Well, well, that will be your look out," said the Squire, good-naturedly. "But, Bristow, it's not worth twelve hundred pounds, nor anything like that sum."

"I think it is, sir—at least to me, and I am quite prepared to pay that amount for it."

"I only gave nine fifty for it; and I thought that if I could get a clear thousand I should have every reason to be perfectly satisfied."

"I have made you an offer, sir. It is for you to say whether you are willing to accept it."

"Seeing that you offer me two hundred pounds more than I ever hoped to get, I'm not such an ass as to say, No. Only I think you are robbing yourself. I do indeed, Bristow; and that's what I don't like to see."

"I think, sir, that I'm pretty well able to look after my own interests," said Tom, with a meaning smile. "Am I to consider that Knockley Holt is to become my property?"

"Of course you are, boy—of course you are. But I must say that you are a little bit of a simpleton to give me twelve hundred when you might have it for a thousand."

"An offer's an offer, and I'll abide by mine."

"Then there's nothing more to be said: I'll see my lawyer about the deeds to-morrow."

Tom shook hands with the Squire, and went in search of Jane.

"Perhaps I may come in now," said Mrs. McDermot five minutes later, as she opened the door of her brother's room.

"Of course you may," said the Squire. "Young Bristow and I were talking over some business affairs before, that would have had no interest for you and that you know nothing about."

"It's about young Bristow, as you call him, that I have come to see you this morning."

"Oh, indeed," said the Squire drily. Then he took off his spectacles and rubbed them with his pocket handkerchief, and began to whistle a tune under his breath.

Mrs. McDermot glared fiercely at him, and her voice took an added tone of asperity when she spoke again. "I suppose you are aware that your protégé is making violent love to your daughter, or else that your daughter is making violent love to him: I hardly know which it is!"

"What!" thundered the Squire, as he started to his feet. "What is that you say, Fanny McDermot?"

"Simply this: there is a lot of love-making going on between Jane and Mr. Bristow. If it is done with your sanction, I have not another word to say. But if you tell me that you know nothing about it, I can only say that you must have been as blind as a bat and as stupid as an owl."

"Thank you, Fanny—thank you," said the Squire sadly, as he sat down in his chair again. "I daresay I have been both blind and stupid; and if what you tell me is true, I must have been."

"Miss Jane couldn't long deceive me," said the widow spitefully.

"Miss Jane is too good a girl to deceive anybody."

"Oh, in love matters we women hold that everything is fair. Deceit then becomes deceit no longer. We call it by a prettier name."

Her brother was not heeding her: he was lost in his own thoughts.

"The young vagabond!" he said at last. "So that's the way he's been hoodwinking me, is it? But I'll teach him: I'll have him know that I'm not to be made a fool of in that way. Make love to my daughter, indeed! I'll have him here to-morrow morning, and tell him a bit of my mind that will astonish him considerably."

"Why wait till to-morrow? Why not send for him now?"

"Because he left here half an hour ago."

"Oh, you would not have far to send for him."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that he and Jane are in the shrubbery together at the present moment."

The Squire stared at her helplessly for a moment or two. "How do you know that?" he said at last, speaking very quietly.

"Because my maid, who was returning from an errand, saw them walking there, arm in arm." She paused, as if expecting her brother to say something, but he did not speak. "I have not had my eyes shut, I assure you," she went on. "But in these matters women are always more quick-sighted than men. From the very first hour of my seeing them together I had my suspicions. All their walking and talking together couldn't be for nothing. All their hand shakings and sly glances into each others' eyes couldn't be without a meaning."

The Squire got up from his chair and rang the bell. A servant came in. "Ascertain whether Mr. Bristow is anywhere about the house or grounds; and if he is, tell him that I should like to see him before he goes."

Mrs. McDermot rose in some alarm. It was no part of her policy to be seen there by Tom. "I am glad you have sent for him," she said. "I hope matters have not gone too far to be stopped without difficulty."

He looked up in a little surprise. "There will be no difficulty. Why should there be?" he said.

"No, of course not. As you say, Why should there be? But I must now bid you good morning for the present. There will be hardly any need, I think, for you to mention my name in the affair."

"There will be no need to mention anybody's name. Good morning."

Mrs. McDermot went out and shut the door gently behind her. "Breaking fast, poor man," she said to herself. "He's not long for this world, I'm afraid. Well, I've the consolation of knowing that I've always done a sister's duty by him. I wonder what he'll die worth. Thousands, no doubt; and all to go to that proud minx of a Jane. We

are not allowed to hate one another, or else I'm afraid I should hate that girl."

She shook her fist at an imaginary Jane, went straight up stairs, and gave her maid a good blowing-up.

Some three weeks had now come and gone since Tom, breaking for once through the restraint which had hitherto kept him back, did and said something which made Jane very happy. What he did was to draw her face down to his and kiss it: what he said was simply, "Good night, my darling." Nothing more, but quite enough to be understood by her to whom the words were spoken. But since that evening not one syllable more of love had been breathed by Tom. For anything that had since passed between them Jane might have imagined that she had merely dreamt the words—that the speaking of them was nothing more than a fancy of her own love-sick brain.

Under similar circumstances many young ladies would have considered themselves aggrieved, and would not have been deemed unreasonable in so thinking. But Jane had no intention whatever of adopting an injured tone even in her own inmost thoughts. She had never been in the habit of looking upon herself in the light of a victim, and she had no intention of beginning to do so now. Surprised—slightly surprised—she might be, but that was all. In Tom's manner towards her, in the way he looked at her, there was that indescribable something which gave her the sweet assurance that she was still loved as much as ever. Such being the case, she was well satisfied to wait. She felt that her lover's silence had a meaning, that he was not dumb without a reason. When the proper time should come he would speak, and to some purpose. Till then Eros should keep a finger on his lips, and speak only the language of the eyes.

"So this is the way you treat me, is it, young man?" said the Squire sternly, as Tom re-entered the room.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Tom, looking at him in sheer amazement.

"Oh, don't pretend that you don't know what I mean."

"It may seem stupid on my part, but I must really plead ignorance."

"You worm yourself into my confidence till you get the run of the house, and can come and go as you like, and you finish up by making love to my daughter!"

"It is no crime to love Miss Culpepper, I hope, sir. There are few people, I imagine, who could know her without loving her."

"That's all very well, but you don't get over me in that way, young sir. What right have you to make love to my daughter? That's what I want to know."

"I may love Miss Culpepper, but I have never told her so."

"Do you mean to say that you have never asked her to marry you?"

"Never, sir; on that point I give you my word of honour."

"A good thing for you that you haven't. The sooner you get that love tom-foolery out of your head the better."

"I promise you one thing, sir," said Tom; "if I ever do marry Miss Culpepper, it shall be with your full consent and good wishes."

The Squire could not help chuckling. "In that case, my boy, you will never have her—not if you live to be as old as Methuselah."

"Time will prove, sir."

"And look ye here. There must be no more walks in the shrubbery, no more gallivanting together among the woods. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir. Your words could not be plainer."

"I mean them to be plain. There seems to be no harm done so far, but it's time this nonsense was put a stop to. Miss Culpepper must marry in a very different sphere from yours."

"Pardon the remark, sir, but you were quite willing to take Mr. Edward Cope as your son-in-law. Now, I consider myself quite as good a man as Mr. Cope—quite as eligible a suitor for your daughter's hand."

"Then I don't. Besides, young Cope would never have had the chance of getting her if he hadn't been the son of my oldest friend: the son of the man to whose bravery I owe my life itself. Master Edward owes it to his father and not to himself that I ever sanctioned his engagement to Miss Culpepper."

"I am indebted for this good turn to Mrs. McDermot," said Tom to himself, as he walked homeward through the park. "It will only have the effect of bringing matters to a climax a little earlier than I intended, but it will not alter my plans in the least."

"Fanny has been exaggerating as usual," was the Squire's comment. "There was something in it, no doubt, and it's just as well to have crushed it in the bud; but I think it hardly worth while to say anything to Jenny about it."

A week later, the Squire happened to be riding on his white pony along the high road that fringed one side of Knockley Holt, when, to his intense astonishment, he heard the regular monotonous puffing and saw the smoke of a steam engine that was apparently hard at work behind a clump of larches in the distance. Riding up to the spot, he found some score or so of men all busily engaged. They were excavating a hole in the hill-side, filling-in stout timber supports as they got deeper down; the engine on the top being employed to hoist up the earth in big bucketfuls as fast as it was dug out.

"What's all this about?" inquired the Squire of one of the men; "and who's gaffer here?"

"Mr. Bristow, he be the gaffer, sur, and this hole be dug by his orders."

"Oh, ho! that's it, is it? And how deep are you going to dig the hole, and what do you expect to find when you get to the bottom?"

"I don't rightly know, sur, but I should think we be digging for water."

"A likely tale that! What the dickens should anybody want water for when we haven't had a dry day for seven weeks?"

"Our foreman did say, sur, as how Mr. Bristow was going to have a hole dug clean through, so as to make a short cut like to the other side of the world. Anyhow, it be mortal dry work."

The Squire gave a grunt of dissatisfaction, and rode off. "What queer crotchet has that young jackanapes got into his head now?" he muttered to himself. "It's just possible, though, that there may be a method in his madness."

CHAPTER XXXII.

AT THE THREE CROWNS HOTEL.

"Hi! Jean, whose is this luggage?" cried Pierre Janvard one morning to his head waiter. He pointed at the same time to a large portmanteau which lay among a pile of other luggage in the hall of the Three Crowns Hotel, Bath.

With that restless curiosity which was such a marked trait in his character, Janvard had a habit of peering about among the luggage of his guests, and even of prying stealthily about their bedrooms when he knew that their occupants were out of the way, and he himself safe from detection. It was not that he hoped to benefit himself in any way, or even to pick up any information that would be of value to him, by such a mode of proceeding; but it had been a habit with him from boyhood to do this kind of thing, and it was a habit that he could by no means overcome.

Passing through the hall this morning his eye had been attracted by a pile of luggage belonging to several fresh arrivals, and he at once began to peer among the labels. The second label that took his eye was inscribed, "Richard Dering, Esq., Passenger to Bath." Janvard stood aghast as he read the name. A crowd of direful memories rushed to his mind. For a moment or two he could not speak. Then he called Jean as above.

"That portmanteau," answered Jean, "belongs to a gentleman who came in by the last train. He and another gentleman came together. They wanted a private sitting-room and I put them into number twenty-nine."

"Has the other gentleman any luggage?"

"Yes, this large black bag belongs to him."

Janvard stooped and read: "Tom Bristow, Esq., Passenger to Bath."

"Quite strange to me, that name," he muttered to himself. At this moment the boots came, and shouldering the luggage hurried with it up stairs.

"They have ordered dinner, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear them say how long they were likely to stay here?"

"No, sir."

"Wait on them yourself at dinner. Bear in mind all that they talk about, and report it to me afterwards."

"Yes, sir."

Pierre Janvard retired to his sanctum considerably disturbed in mind. Was the fresh arrival any relation or connection of the dead Lionel Dering? or was it merely one of those coincidences of name common enough in everyday life? These were the two questions that he put to himself again and again.

One thing was quite evident to him. Himself unseen, he must contrive to see this unknown Richard Dering. If there were a possibility of the slightest shadow of danger springing either from this or from any other quarter, it behoved him to be on his guard. He would see these people, after which, if requisite, he would at once write to Mr. Kester St. George for instructions.

He had just brought his cogitations to an end, and had opened his banker's passbook, the contemplation of which was a never-failing source of joy to him, when a tap came to the door, and next moment in walked Mr. Richard Dering and Mr. Tom Bristow.

It was on the face of this Richard Dering that Pierre Janvard's eyes rested first. In one brief glance he took in every detail of his appearance. Then his eyes fell. His sallow face grew sallower still. His thin lips quivered for a moment, and then his hands began to tremble slightly, so that in a little while he was obliged to take them off the table and bury them in his pockets.

He saw at once that this Mr. Dering must be a near relative of that other Mr. Dering whose face he remembered so well—whose face it was impossible that he should ever forget. They were alike, and yet strangely unlike: the same in many points, and yet in others most different. But the moment this dark-looking stranger opened his lips, it seemed indeed as if Lionel Dering had come back from the grave. A covert glance at Mr. Bristow assured Janvard that in him he beheld a man whose face he had no recollection of having ever seen before.

"Your name is Janvard, I believe?" said Mr. Dering, with a slight bow.

"Pierre Janvard, at your service," answered the Frenchman, deferentially.

"You were formerly, I believe, in the service of Mr. Kester St. George?"

"I had that honour."

"My name is Dering—Richard Dering. It is probable that you never heard of me before, seeing that I have only lately returned from India. I am cousin to Mr. Kester St. George."

The Frenchman bowed. "I have no recollection of having heard monsieur's name mentioned by my late employer."

"I suppose not. But my brother's name—Lionel Dering—must be well known to you."

Janvard could not repress a slight start. So that was the relationship, was it?

"Ah, yes," he said. "I have seen Mr. Lionel Dering many times, and done several little services for him at one time or another."

"You were one of the chief witnesses on the trial, if I recollect rightly?"

Janvard coughed, to gain a moment's time. The conversation was taking a turn that he did not approve of. "I certainly was one of the witnesses on the trial," he said with an air of deprecation. "But monsieur will understand that it was a misfortune which I had no means of avoiding. I could not help seeing what I did see, and they made me tell all about it."

"Oh, we quite understand that!" said Mr. Dering. "You were not to blame in any way. You could not do otherwise than as you did."

Janvard smiled faintly, and bowed his gratification.

"My friend here, Mr. Bristow, and myself, have come down to stay a week or two in your charming city. The doctors tell me there is something the matter with my spleen, and have recommended me to drink the Bath waters. Hearing casually that you were the proprietor of one of the most comfortable hotels in the place, and looking upon you somewhat in the light of a connection of the family, we thought that we could not do better than take up our quarters with you."

Again Janvard smiled and bowed his gratification. "Monsieur may depend upon my using my utmost endeavours to make himself and his friend as comfortable as possible. Pardon my presumption, but may I venture to ask whether Mr. St. George was quite well when monsieur saw or heard from him last?"

"My cousin was a little queer a short time ago, but I believe him to be well again by this time." Mr. Dering turned to go. "We have given your waiter instructions as to dinner," he said.

"I hope my chef will succeed in pleasing you," said Janvard with a smile. "He has the reputation of being second to none in the city." With the same smile on his face he followed them to the door and bowed them out, and, still smiling, watched them till they turned the corner of the street. "No danger there, I think," he said to himself. "None whatever. Still I must keep on the watch—always

on the watch. I must look to their dinners myself, and leave them nothing to complain of. But I shall be pleased—very much pleased indeed when they call for their bill. To-night I will write and tell everything to Mr. St. George."

Said Tom to Lionel, as they were walking arm-in-arm towards the pump-room: "Did you notice that magnificent ring which Janvard wore on the third finger of his left hand?"

"I could not fail to notice it. I was thinking about it at the very moment you spoke."

"I have not seen so splendid a ruby for a long time. The setting, too, is rather unique."

"Yes, it was the peculiar setting that caused me to recognise it again."

"That caused you to recognise it! You don't mean to say that you have ever seen the ring before?"

"I certainly have seen it before."

"Where?"

"On the finger of Percy Osmond."

Tom halted suddenly and stared at Lionel as if he could hardly believe the evidence of his ears.

"I am stating nothing but the simple truth," continued Lionel. "The moment I saw the ring on Janvard's finger the thought flashed through me that I had certainly seen it somewhere before. All the time I was talking to Janvard I was trying to call that somewhere to mind, but it did not come to me till after we had left the hotel—not, in fact, till a minute before you spoke about it."

"Are you sure you are not mistaken? There are many ruby rings in the world."

"I don't for one moment think that I am mistaken," answered Lionel deliberately. "If the ring worn by Janvard be the one I mean, it has three initial letters engraved inside the hoop. What particular letters they are I cannot now recollect. I chanced to express my admiration of the ring one night in the billiard-room, and Osmond took it off his finger in order that I might examine it. It was then I saw the letters, but without noticing them with sufficient particularity to remember them again."

"I always had an idea," said Tom, "that Janvard was in some way mixed up with the murder, and this would seem to prove it. He must have stolen the ring from Osmond's room either immediately before or immediately after the murder."

"I must see that ring," said Lionel decisively. "It must come into my possession, if only for a minute or two, if only while I ascertain whether the initials are really there."

"I don't think that there will be much difficulty about that," said Tom. "The fellow has no suspicion as to whom you really are, or as

to the object of our visit to Bath. To admire the ring is the first step: to ask to look at it the second."

A quarter of an hour later Lionel gripped Tom suddenly by the arm. "Bristow," he whispered, "I have just remembered something. Osmond had that ruby ring on his finger the night before he was murdered! I have a distinct recollection of seeing it on his hand when we were playing that last game of billiards together."

"If this ring," said Tom, "prove to be the one you believe it to be, the finding of it will be another and a most important link in the chain of evidence."

"Yes—almost, if not quite, the last one that we shall need," said Lionel.

At dinner that evening Janvard in person took in the wine. The eyes of both Lionel and Tom fixed themselves instinctively on his left hand. The ring was no longer there.

"Can he suspect anything?" asked Lionel of Tom, as soon as they were alone.

"I think not," answered Tom. "The fellow is evidently uneasy, and will continue to be so as long as you stay under his roof. But the very openness of our proceedings, and the frank way in which we have told him who we are, will go far to disarm any suspicions which he might otherwise have entertained."

Two or three days passed quietly over. Lionel drank the waters with regularity, and he and Tom drove out frequently in the neighbourhood of King Bladud's beautiful city. Janvard always gave them a look in in the course of dinner to see that everything was to their satisfaction; but he still carefully abstained from wearing the ring.

By-and-by there came a certain evening when Janvard failed to pu in his usual appearance at the dinner table. Said Tom to the man who waited upon them: "Where is your master this evening? Not ill, I hope?"

"Gone to a masonic banquet, sir," answered the man.

"Then he won't be home till late, I'll wager."

"Not till eleven or twelve, I dare say, sir."

"Gone in full fig, of course?" said Tom, laughingly.

"Yes, sir," answered the man with a grin.

"Diamond studs and ruby ring, and everything complete, eh went on Tom.

"I don't know about diamond studs, sir," said the man, "but he certainly had his ring on, for I saw it on his finger myself."

"Now is our time," said Tom to Lionel, as soon as the man had left the room. "We may not have such an opportunity again."

It was close upon midnight when Pierre Janvard, alighting from a fly at the door of his hotel, found his two lodgers standing on the steps

smoking a last cigar before turning in for the night. In this there was nothing unusual—nothing to excite suspicion.

"Hallo! Janvard, is that you?" cried Tom, assuming the tone and manner of a man who has taken a little too much wine. "I was just wondering what had become of you. This is my birthday; so you must come upstairs with us, and drink my health in some of your own wine."

"Another time, sir, I shall be most happy; but to-night ——"

"But me no buts," cried Tom. "I'll have no excuses—none. Come along, Dering, and we'll crack another bottle of Janvard's Madeira. We'll poison mine host with his own tipple."

He seized Janvard by the arm and dragged him up-stairs, trolling out the last popular air as he did so. Lionel followed leisurely.

"You're a good sort, Janvard—a very good sort!" said Tom.

"Monsieur is very kind," said Janvard, with a smile and a shrug; and then in obedience to a waive from Tom's hand, he sat down at table. Tom now began to fumble with a bottle and a corkscrew.

"Allow me, monsieur," said Janvard politely, as he relieved Tom of the articles in question, and proceeded to open the bottle with the ease of long practice.

"That's a sweet thing in rings you've got on your finger," said Tom admiringly.

"Yes, it is rather a fine stone," said Janvard drily.

"May I be allowed to examine it?" asked Tom, as he poured out the wine with a hand that was slightly unsteady.

"I should be most happy to oblige monsieur," said Janvard hastily, "but the ring fits me so tightly that I am afraid I should have some difficulty in getting it off my finger."

"Hang it all, man, the least you can do is to try," cried Tom.

The Frenchman flushed slightly, drew off the ring with some little difficulty, and passed it across the table to Tom. Tom's fingers clutched it like a vice. Janvard saw the movement and half rose as if to reclaim the ring; but it was too late, and he sat down without speaking.

Tom pushed the ring carelessly over one of his fingers and turned it towards the light. "A very pretty gem, indeed!" he said. "And worth something considerable in sovereigns, I should say."

"Will you allow me to examine it for a moment?" asked Lionel gravely, as he held out his hand. For the second time Janvard half rose from his seat, and for the second time he sat down without a word. Tom handed the ring across to Lionel.

"A magnificent stone indeed," said the latter, "but somewhat old-fashioned in the setting. But that only makes it the more valuable in my eyes. A family heirloom, without doubt. And see! inside the hoop are three initials; somewhat difficult to decipher, but if I read them aright they are M. K. L."

"Yes, yes, monsieur," said Janvard uneasily. "As you say, M. K. L.

The initials of the friend who gave me the ring." He held out his hand as if expecting that the ring should at once be given back to him, but Lionel took no notice of the action.

"Three very curious initials, indeed," said Lionel, musingly. "One could not readily fit them to many names. M. K. L. They put me in mind of a curious coincidence—of a very remarkable coincidence indeed. I once had a friend who had a ruby ring very similar to this one, and inside the hoop of my friend's ring were three initials. The initials in question were M. K. L. Precisely the same as the letters engraved on your ring, Monsieur Janvard. Curious, is it not?"

"Mille diables! I am betrayed!" cried Janvard, as he started from his seat and made a snatch at the ring. But Lionel was too quick for him. The ring had disappeared, but Janvard had it not.

He turned with a snarl like that of a wild animal brought to bay, and looked towards the door. But between him and the door now stood Tom Bristow, no longer with any signs of inebriety about him, but as cold, quiet, and collected as ever he had looked in his life. Tom's right hand was hidden in the bosom of his vest, and Janvard's ears were smitten by the ominous click of a revolver. His eyes wandered back to the stern dark face of Lionel. There was no hope for him there. The pallor of his face deepened. His wonderful nerve for once was beginning to desert him. He was trembling visibly.

"Sit down, sir," said Lionel, sternly, "and refresh yourself with another glass of wine. I have something of much importance to say to you."

The Frenchman hesitated for a moment. Then he shrugged his shoulders and sat down. His sang-froid was coming back to him. He drank two glasses of wine rapidly one after another.

"I am ready, monsieur," he said quietly, as he wiped his thin lips and made a ghastly effort to smile. "At your service."

"What I want from you, and what you must give me," said Lionel, "is a full and particular account of how this ring came into your possession. It belonged to Percy Osmond, and it was on his finger the night he was murdered."

"Ah ciel! how do you know that?"

"It is enough that what I say is true, and that you cannot gainsay it. But this ring was not on the finger of the murdered man when he was found next morning. Tell me how it came into your possession."

For a moment or two Janvard did not speak. Then he said, sulkily: "Who are you that come here under false pretences and question me and threaten me in this way?"

"I am not here to answer your questions. You are here to answer mine."

"What if I refuse to answer them?"

"In that case the four walls of a prison will hold you in less than

half an hour. In your possession I find a ring which was on the finger of Mr. Osmond the night he was murdered. Less than that has brought many a better man than you to the gallows: be careful that it does not land you there."

"If you know anything of the affair at all, you must know that the murderer of Mr. Osmond was tried and found guilty long ago."

"What proof have you—what proof was there adduced at the trial, that Lionel Dering was the murderer of Percy Osmond? Did your eyes, or those of anyone else, see him do the bloody deed? Wretch! You knew from the first that he was innocent! If you yourself are not the murderer, you know the man who is."

Again Janvard was silent for a little while. His eyes were bent on the floor. He was considering deeply within himself. At length he spoke, but it was in the same sullen tone that he had used before.

"What guarantee have I that when I have told you anything that I may know, the information will not be used against me to my own harm?"

"You have no guarantee whatever. I could not give you any such promise. For aught I know to the contrary, you, and you alone, may be the murderer of Percy Osmond."

Janvard shuddered slightly. "I am not the murderer of Percy Osmond," he said quietly.

"Who, then, was the murderer?"

"My late master—Mr. Kester St. George."

There was a pause which no one seemed inclined to break. Although Janvard's words were but a confirmation of the suspicions which Lionel and Tom had all along entertained, they seemed to fall on their ears with all the force of a startling revelation. Of the three men there, Janvard was the one who seemed least concerned.

Lionel was the first to speak. "This is a serious charge to make against a gentleman like Mr. St. George," he said.

"I have made no charge against Mr. St. George," said Janvard. "It is you who have forced the confession from me."

"You are doubtless prepared to substantiate your statement—to prove your words?"

"I do not want to prove anything. I want to hold my tongue, but you will not let me."

"All I want from you is the simple truth, and that you must tell me."

"But, monsieur ——" began Janvard appealingly, and then he stopped.

"You are afraid, and justly so. You are in my power, and I can use that power in any way that I may deem best. At the same time, understand me. I am no constable—no officer of the law—I am imply the brother of Lionel Dering, and knowing, as I do, that he

was accused and found guilty of a crime of which he was as innocent as I am, I have vowed that I will not rest night or day till I have discovered the murderer and brought him to justice. Such being the case, I tell you plainly that the best thing you can do is to make a full and frank confession of all that you know respecting this terrible business, leaving it for me afterwards to decide as to the use which I may find it requisite to make of your confession. Are you prepared to do what I ask of you?"

Janvard's shoulders rose and fell again. "I cannot help myself," he said. "I have no choice but to comply with the wishes of monsieur."

"Sensibly spoken. Try another glass of wine. It may help to refresh your memory."

"Alas! monsieur, my memory needs no refreshing. The incidents of that night are far too terrible to be forgotten." With a hand that still shook slightly he poured himself out another glass of wine and drank it off at a draught. Then he continued: "On the night of the quarrel in the billiard-room at Park Newton I was sitting up for my master, Mr. St. George. About midnight the bell rang for me, and on answering it, my master put Mr. Osmond into my hands, he being somewhat the worse for wine, with instructions to see him safely to bed. This I did, and then left him. As it happened, I had taken a violent fancy to Mr. Osmond's splendid ruby ring—the very ring monsieur has now in his possession—and that night I determined to make it my own. There were several new servants in the house, and nobody would suspect me of having taken it. Mr. Osmond had drawn it off his finger, and thrown it carelessly into his dressing-bag and locked it up before getting into bed, afterwards putting his keys under his pillow.

"When the house was quiet, I put on a pair of list slippers and made my way to Mr. Osmond's bed-room. The door was unlocked and I went in. A night lamp was burning on the dressing-table. The full moon shone in through the uncurtained window, and its rays slanted right across the sleeper's face. He lay there, sleeping the sleep of the drunken, with one hand clenched, and a frown on his face as if he were still threatening Mr. Dering. It was hardly the work of a minute to possess myself of the keys. In another minute the dressing-case was opened and the ring my own. Mr. Osmond's portmanteau stood invitingly open: what more natural than that I should desire to turn over its contents lightly and delicately? In such cases I am possessed by the simple curiosity of a child. I was down on my knees before the portmanteau, admiring this, that, and the other, when to my horror, I heard the noise of coming footsteps. No concealment was possible, save that afforded by the long curtains which shaded one of the windows. Next moment I was safely hidden behind them.

"The footsteps came nearer and nearer, and then some one entered the room. The sleeping man still breathed heavily. Now and then he moaned in his sleep. All my fear of being found out could not keep me from peeping out of my hiding-place. What I saw was my master, Mr. Kester St. George, standing over the sleeping man, with a look on his face that I had never seen there before. He stood thus for a full minute, and then he came round to the near side of the bed, and seemed to be looking for Mr. Osmond's keys. In a little while he saw them in the dressing-bag where I had left them. Then he crossed to the other side of the room and proceeded to try them one by one, till he had found the right one, in the lock of Mr. Osmond's writing-case. He opened the case, took out of it Mr. Osmond's cheque book, and from that he tore either one or two blank cheques. He had just relocked the writing-case when Mr. Osmond suddenly awoke and started up in bed. 'Villain! what are you doing there?' he cried, as he flung back the bedclothes. But before he could set foot to the floor, Mr. St. George sprang at his throat, and pinned him down almost as easily as if he had been a boy. What happened during the next minute I hardly know how to describe. It would seem that Mr. Osmond was in the habit of sleeping with a dagger under his pillow. At all events there was one there on this particular night. As soon as he found himself pinned down in bed, his hand sought for and found this dagger, and next moment he made a sudden stab with it at the breast of Mr. St. George. But my master was too quick for him. There was an instant's struggle—a flash—a cry—and—you may guess the rest.

"A murmur of horror escaped my lips. In another instant my master had sprung across the room and had torn away the curtains from before me. 'You here!' he said. And for a few seconds I thought my fate would be the same as that of Mr. Osmond. But at last his hand dropped. 'Janvard, you and I must be friends,' he said. 'From this night your interests are mine, and my interests are yours.' Then we left the room together. A terrible night, monsieur, as you may well believe!"

"You have accounted clearly enough for the murder, but you have not yet told us how it happened that Lionel Dering came to be accused of the crime."

"That is the worst part of the story, sir. Whose thought it was first, whether Mr. St. George's or mine, to lay the murder at the door of Mr. Dering, I could not now tell you. It was a thought that seemed to come into the heads of both of us at the same moment. As monsieur knows, my master had no cause to love his cousin. He had every reason to hate him. Mr. Dering had got all the estates and property that ought to have been Mr. St. George's. But if Mr. Dering were to die without children, the estate would all come back to his cousin. Reason enough for wishing Mr. Dering dead.

"We did not talk much about it, my master and I. We understood one another without many words. There were certain things to be done which Mr. St. George had not the nerve to do. I had the nerve to do them, and I did them. It was I who put Mr. Dering's stud under the bed. It was I who took his handkerchief, and ——"

"Enough!" said Lionel, with a shudder. "Surely no more devilish plot was ever hatched by Satan himself! You—you who sit so calmly there, had but to hold up your little finger to save an innocent man from disgrace and death!"

"What would monsieur have?" said Janvard, with another of his indescribable shrugs. "Mr. St. George was my master. I liked him, and I was, besides, to have a large sum of money given me to keep silence. Mr. Dering was a stranger to me. Voilà tout."

"Janvard, you are one of the vilest wretches that ever disgraced the name of man!"

"Monsieur s'amuse."

"I shall at once proceed to put down in writing the heads of the confession which you have just made. You will sign the writing in question in the presence of Mr. Bristow as witness. You need be under no apprehension that any immediate harm will happen to you. As for Mr. St. George, I will deal with him in my own time, and in my own way. There are, however, two points that I wish you to bear particularly in mind. Firstly, if, even by the vaguest hint, you dare to let Mr. St. George know that you have told me what you have told me to-night, it will be at your own proper peril, and you must be prepared to take the consequences that will immediately ensue. Secondly, you must hold yourself entirely at my service, and must come to me without delay whenever I may send for you, and wherever I may be. Do you clearly understand?"

"Yes, sir. I understand."

"For the present, then, I have done with you. Two hours later I will send for you again, in order that you may sign a certain paper which will be ready by that time. You may go."

"But, monsieur ——"

"Not a word. Go."

Tom held open the door for him, and Janvard passed out without another word.

"At last, Dering! At last everything is made clear!" said Tom, as he crossed the room and laid his hand affectionately on Lionel's shoulder. "At last you can proclaim your innocence to the world."

"Yes, my task is nearly done," said Lionel, sadly. "And I thank heaven in all sincerity that it is so. But the duty that I have still to perform is a terrible one. I almost feel as if now, at this, the eleventh hour, I could go no farther. I shrink in horror from the last and most terrible step of all. Hark! whose voice was that?"

"I hear nothing save the moaning of the wind, and the low muttering of thunder far away among the hills."

"It seemed to me that I heard the voice of Percy Osmond calling to me from the grave—the same voice that I have heard so often in my dreams."

"How your hand burns, Dering! Shake off these wild fancies, I implore you," said Tom. "What a blinding flash was that!"

"They are no wild fancies to me, but most dread realities. I tell you it is Osmond's voice that I hear. I know it but too well. 'Thou shalt avenge!' it says to me. Only three words: 'Thou shalt avenge!'"

(*To be continued.*)

SLUMBER SONG.

SLUMBER, slumber, darling; peace enfolds thee;
In her arms she holds thee
Gently whilst I sing.
Rest thee, rest thee, deep in dreamland rest thee,
Up to heaven haste thee,
Echoes ring.
Fair the hour,
Deep the power
Which afar from every ill
Lulled thee, softly hushed and still—so still!
Slumber, slumber, darling; peace enfolds thee;
In her arms she holds thee, whilst I sing.

Wake thee, wake thee, in the early morning,
When the sunlight, dawning,
Whispers it is day;
Sweetly, sweetly, from thy dreams emerging,
As swiftly flows the surging
Wave away.
Fairy faces,
Elfin graces,
Softly whisper all day long
Of thy dreaming by my song, my song.
Wake thee, wake thee, in the early morning,
When the sunlight, dawning, whispers day!

A DORSETSHIRE HARVEST HOME.

By Anne Beale.

MUCH has been said of late concerning Dorsetshire agricultural distress; perhaps a sketch of contemporaneous Dorsetshire agricultural amusement may not be without interest.

Let the reader first imagine the scene. A dry, well-thatched barn, floored in the centre with planks, and at either end with a mixture of white sand and mortar—quadruple doors on each side the planks, and a small window near the roof. Surrounding the barn, a dairyman's house; some labourers' cottages; a farm-yard, a country road, hills and fields. Beyond, a pretty villa, with smooth lawn and a wealth of flowers. On one side, and still beyond, a coast-guard station and rocks; on the other, a picturesque mill and hills. Below, a small hamlet, containing half a dozen more cottages, an inn, and some fishermen's huts. In front of all, the sea.

The inhabitants of the villa were astir betimes, for the harvest had been safely brought in from the surrounding hills, and there was to be a harvest home in the big barn. The kitchen steamed with cooking, and so did the shepherd's house. Into the large boiler of the latter went bushels of potatoes, carrots and turnips, and into its oven colossal pies and puddings. The shepherd's wife and a neighbour had as much as they could do to feed the fires with furze and empty the well-cooked vegetables into great white tubs for transfer to the barn.

While they are thus engaged, let us glance at the cottage: it is neat, comfortable, and water-tight, and contains a good kitchen, another room on the ground-floor, and two or three bedrooms. On a settle in the kitchen sits an elderly woman, vigorously paring vegetables: she is surrounded by decent furniture, pictures, flowers and bird-cages. She has tame doves, blackbirds and thrushes, which, to judge from the soaked bread in their domiciles, certainly do not suffer from agricultural distress. Neither, apparently, does their mistress, nor the children that swarm in and out, nor the cat that purrs on, indifferent to the birds. Groups of young folks were standing about the barn, fine, healthy, happy specimens of our English peasantry. The elder girls had babies in their arms, and brothers and sisters at their skirts, and all were dressed in their best. They had been idly expectant for some hours, strolling here, peeping there, and doing their utmost to look into the barn, the lower doors of which were closed against them. Much hammering was heard within, for the farm-bailiff and another labourer were knocking up rough planks into tables and forms, and fitting them over barrels and trestles.

While the rough carpentry was in progress, sconces containing com-

posites were hung round the barn, and, when the hammering ceased, damask table-cloths were spread over the boards. On these were laid abundance of accessories, and by three o'clock all was ready.

The harvest was housed, and those who had helped to sow and reap were welcomed to the Home. The tired teams that had dragged the heavy waggons up and down the hills were resting; the cows were afield; the sheep were on the neighbouring hill-side; the poultry were everywhere; but all were idle for the rest of the day. Sunshine was on land and sea, and the scene was glorious.

The fiddler was the first to arrive. He was a tall, lean man, and, to judge between him and the robust labourers, fiddling did not pay as well as field-work. Four-and-twenty of these came in slowly, some in undress smock-frocks, others in their best coats. It was ordained that the bread-winners should be best placed, first served, and independent of the worry of wives and children. They appreciated the arrangement, and filled one long table, while thirty or forty of their belongings surrounded the other board. In came the steaming tubs of vegetables; in came huge pieces of roast and boiled beef, followed by abnormally big legs of pork, and meat pies of commensurate size.

The mistresses took their seats at the top and bottom of the tables, and servants, longing to be guests, waited. Carving, eating and drinking began with a will, and young and old stowed away as much as they conveniently could, just reserving "a corner for thot."

The "thot" were plum-puddings, that made one think of the ball of St. Paul's. How hot, rich, and excellent they were! Children, in and out of arms, poked their fingers into the raisins, and their elders eat as much as they desired. There was no stint of food that day, at least.

The feasting lasted till nearly five o'clock, when the guests dispersed for awhile to let the barn be cleared. The remnants of the banquet were sent here and there to absentees, or reserved for future distribution amongst the hamlet; for, in this instance, charity neither began nor ended at home.

While the women and children wandered about, or gossiped from cottage to cottage, the tinkle of the sheep-bells and the low of kine sounded. The shepherd and his dog were bringing the flocks from the hills to their fold behind the villa, and a white mass moved over the sward; while the cows came home leisurely to the milking, pausing to drink of the clear brook, then disappearing one by one into the farmyard. The glow from the west fell on hill and hamlet, and peace stole in with it.

But the fiddle struck up, accompanied by a vigorous tambourine, and life and sound succeeded to the temporary lull. The barn gradually refilled, and dancing soon began. Still there was a crowd

of eager little faces watching and peeping outside—children in sun-bonnets and pinafores, who belonged to the coast-guard and fishermen. They were invited in to swell the party, and, during the course of the evening, many other neighbours, unconnected with the farm, were added to the throng, which numbered at least nearly a hundred.

It was dancing in earnest, and the high, pointed roof echoed with the convulsions of the planks. The stalwart bailiff and his comely, silk-attired wife led off every dance, and showed what a "consistful practice" could effect. They were light of foot if heavy of shoe, and were never the first to bring either country-dance or reel to a close. It is worthy of remark, and possibly of imitation, that all the married couples danced together the whole evening, and appeared quite proud of one another. Also it is noteworthy that the young men and women rarely changed partners, but, making an early choice, clung to it. This harvest-home partnership not unfrequently ends in a matrimonial reel and life-long country-dance.

The dances were more vigorous than various. Some people, overcome by satiety, might have found the repetition of two or at most three figures during six hours even slightly tedious; but these good folk did not. Down the middle, up the sides, and vis-à-vis went couple after couple, all at once, and with untiring zeal. The line of men footed it opposite the line of women with an ardour beyond praise. Now arms and toes, now arms and heels, advancing, retreating, and finally hob-nailing, with a resolution which, if not elegant, was not altogether ungraceful. The reels were equally successful; but that modern innovation, the polka, met with less general favour, and only a dozen couples or so attempted it. During an occasional pause, "hands all round, back again, and poussette" was improvised for the children, who did their duty quite as well as their elders, and enjoyed doing it, which is more than we can all say.

Indeed, the children were scarcely bystanders at all; they made wonderful attempts at imitative steps outside the charmed circle of dancers, and every little foot was in motion, though restricted to small space. Two ploughboys of about twelve or thirteen years old were especially persevering. With large felt hats stuck up in front, white smock-frocks, black trousers, and very loud shoes, they danced together all the evening. When they could squeeze themselves into the bottom of the country-dance, they were there; when there was not room even for two flies at this magic spot, they became outsiders. A foot of space sufficed them, and, with eyes riveted on the dancers, arms stuck to their sides, and feet and legs in motion, they passed their evening quite agreeably. They were neither dull nor stolid looking, but content in their sphere, as long as it was needful they should stick to it. When a proper opportunity occurred for a lift, they were ready, because they had been patiently observant, and bided their time.

They had learnt the figure eight by observation, having used their eyes while their feet moved; and when invited to try the reel, they performed it for the first time with precision. Sir Isaac Newton was scarcely better pleased when, from observation of the falling apple, he discovered gravitation.

The women and children were wonderfully well dressed. There was no tawdry finery; for if a girl wore a ribbon in her hair, or a child a sash, they were new and fresh. Neither were there any monstrous heads, though they were not unfashionably dressed.

Perhaps the babies had the worst of it for once, though they behaved admirably, and did not allow their sleep to be disturbed by strange cradles. Some were picketed on settle and window-seat in the nearest cottage with the doves and starlings; others were passed from arm to arm while the transferrers performed; others stared about in open-eyed surprise.

Midway in the entertainment the women went to the villa to tea. Bread and cheese was sent out for the men, and cake and tea for the children. The old men smoked their pipes at the end of the barn, and drank ale and cider, and the fiddler rested for a very short space. What a capital fiddler he was! As the bailiff justly remarked, it was impossible not to dance to such music, for he "zet oone a gwain." The Dorset dialect does not, certainly, progress with this progressive age, but remains much as Mr. Barnes, the Dorsetshire Burns, has written it in his poems. Here is a verse from his "Harvest Huome":—

"Zoo ater supper wer a done,
Tha cleared the tiables, and begun
To have a little bit o' fun
As long as tha mid stop.
The wold oones took ther pipes to smoke,
An' tell their tiales, an' lafe and joke,
A looken at the younger voke
That got up var a hop."

Again the fiddler scrapes, and the dance recommences unflaggingly as ever. But now songs relieve its monotony. Labourers sing at one end of the barn, coast-guardsmen at the other, women in the centre. The name of each song is repeated at its close, and applause succeeds. All join in chorus, and the fiddler accompanies one lady who gives "The Mistletoe Bough," at the very top of her shrill soprano.

Meanwhile two dogs wandered about among the folk, observant and inquisitive. The one a leanish spaniel, good at eating, that held up his foot for commiseration, because he had lately had a thorn in it. "The tither was a shepherd's collie," that a Landseer would have given pounds to paint. And he was a good sitter; he was entirely white, with long, shaggy hair, soft, thoughtful, brown eyes, lop ears, and meditative manners. It was no wonder the sheep obeyed him, for he

was painfully obedient himself. A word sent him to the wall, a word recalled him. If his worth was appreciated, his beauty was not; for nobody seemed to understand how good-looking he was. Unlike dogs of higher breeding, he did not refuse to eat bread with his cheese, but swallowed both humbly and thankfully. Like the ploughboys, he watched the dancing, but he did not imitate it; he was too grand for that; and one wondered what he thought of it as he sat, sleeplessly erect in a corner, cogitating. At any rate, he was too well-mannered to interfere with the dancing animals on whom he gazed.

At about midnight the men formed a circle, cider-cup in hand. All sang, one after another, a health-song, which, although some thirty times repeated, did not pall on the listeners, who joined as energetically in the chorus the last as the first time. Though the ale and cider were unlimited, the dancing and presence of the ladies prevented drunkenness.

It was one o'clock when the fiat went forth of positively only one more country-dance. They made it as long as they could, and only ended when the fiddler was tired out. He was, however, refreshed by a hearty supper.

The moon was shining on hill and sea when we left the barn. What a scene it was! The happy assembly trooped off, some to homes nigh at hand, others to more distant ones among the hills. The bailiff and his wife mounted a cart, declaring that they were ready to begin it all over again, as, indeed, affirmed all the rest. We lingered in the moonlight till the last guest departed. Aroused by the unwonted sounds, forth from their dormitories came a flock of white geese. Following one another in ghostly procession, they waddled down to the stream and began to drink. Having paddled and chattered awhile, they returned to the greensward, looking like a patch of pure snow underneath the cold moon. Having wiped their feet, they again formed single file and returned, in stately, measured fashion, to their rest. How beautiful it was! The waves rippled in the moonshine; the giant cliffs gleamed; the hills sparkled with dew-gems; the hamlet slumbered in light; and, one by one, the snow-white birds disappeared.

A FREAK OF FORTUNE.

An Incident in the Life of Pio Nono.

By Margaret Howitt.

IT was an afternoon in last October. The rain came down in torrents, and the wind whistled through the bare brick corridors of the great monastic-like building of the Villa Grünwald, in the wild hill-town of Monte del Caccia, which, perched aloft on one of the peaks of the Sabine Hills, within sight of Rome, was yet a good half-day's distance from that city. I sat and shivered in the large barely-furnished saloon with my hostess the Signora Giulia, who, there being neither fireplace nor stove in this her country residence, sat huddled up in a fur cloak and felt slippers. She looked very disconsolate, and busied herself in reckoning up the time in her pocket "Diario Romano" till All Saints' Day, the festival when, according to old-established custom, she returned to Rome. Earlier than that date she could not or would not go. Then servants, beds, bedding and half the furniture accompanied their mistress to her town residence; and the ample, but at that season somewhat cheerless and comfortless villa: the pride and ornament of lofty Monte del Caccia, where it stood looking out over the broad Campagna, with its pillared and pedimented front, like a white marble temple: remained deserted, save for the somewhat lax supervision of a neighbouring vine-dresser.

All, however, was safe from plunder or spoliation, for the Signora Giulia was adored by the wild population as half a saint. She would have been a whole saint, but for one little circumstance—she was not of Italian, but of German origin. Still, although she was the daughter of a celebrated northern painter, and the widow of a German sculptor, Herr Grünwald, yet she had lived more than half her life in Italy, and was a devout Catholic. The hot *papalini* race of Monte del Caccia did not believe more blindly than she did in the infallibility of the Holy Father. They were quite agreed that the insurgents from Florence were not Romani but Pagani; and they had faith in the restoration of the temporal power, because the good signora prayed for it day and night. So she was in very good odour there; together with her only son, the young padrone, the Signor Frederigo. He had been brought up amongst them, was quite an Italian, and worthy to be the syndic of Monte del Caccia. For all this, however, the house was best known as the Casa Tedesca.

The wind blew and the rain still poured down, but the Signora Giulia, being a lively lady, and having satisfactorily terminated her calculations, suddenly sprang up, saying:

"Let us visit the mummies!" and then, without further explanation, having produced a key from her capacious pocket, led the way to her lumber-room. This *rumpel-kammer*, as she termed it, in her cosmopolitan language, was a place where indeed many things were in a rumple. What a confusion it was! Medicine-bottles, books of devotion, crucifixes, rosaries, portmanteaus, dressing-cases, a German zither, top-boots, saddles, extra bedding, and no end of crockery, old and new. She made her way with difficulty through all this confused lumber to an antique Moorish coffer, lifted the lid, and said, "Here are the mummies."

It was full of packets of letters, tied up separately, but all tossed together in the greatest confusion—old yellow letters, mostly written in faded ink, some in the delicate German character, some were French, and others Italian.

"The correspondence chiefly of my poor Papa," she said, with a sad smile. "I've been making up my mind to sort them for years; they are worth the trouble. You are methodical and patient; you'll help me, won't you?"

Without waiting for my assent, the signora made a sort of vigorous dive down into the box, and brought up a huge sheaf of letters; then, bidding me do the same, "as there was no time like the present," led the way back to the saloon.

My diving into that chaos of correspondence had not been unsuccessful, and I was soon deep in a task which I found anything but wearisome, so curious and interesting were the very first letters and memorandums upon which I alighted. They had evidently been already arranged, most probably by the old painter himself, and dated back from the commencement of this century. One memorandum amongst others, marked 1805, in the painter's handwriting, described the friendly reception given him by that good-natured old lady, Angelica Kauffmann, at her pleasant rooms in the Via Sistina. The next was a note, also written in Rome, by the German poet Tieck, begging for the loan of a few scudi as he and his brother the sculptor were in grievous want of money, and did not know where else to turn. Next came a letter of introduction presented by Madame de Staël. I was holding an invitation-card to the painter from Madame Buonaparte, of a still earlier date, in my hand, when a merry ringing laugh from my companion made me look up.

"Now I have found in this omnium gatherum," she said, "something racy! We've done very well for once. Now let us put all these letters and papers as they are into the drawer of this cabinet. It is growing dusk, and, instead of ruining our eyes, I will tell you the amusing story which this letter has brought back to my mind. It is from the father of the present Zuccone, of the villa yonder, who became so great by what one may call a freak of fortune. No, you shall not look at it, though it is

worth reading, for he did not know how to spell; and yet he was the Cavaliere! It will do me good to laugh, for then I shall get warm; and, when I have ended, Cammillo will have announced dinner: then, over our soup, roast pigeons, and hot wine, we shall forget the weather."

And now, dear reader, after this little prelude I will myself step aside, and, having introduced the worthy Signora Giulia to you, leave her to tell her own story; merely premising that I can vouch for its entire truth. She spoke as follows:—

I.

It was in the year 1852 that we first ventured to remain through the whole summer in Italy, and the reason for our so doing was this: Lord Bevis, the well-known English Catholic nobleman, who was spending the summer at Albano, had given my husband a commission for a monument or tomb for his own daughter and heiress, the young Veronica, who had died, the preceding spring, at their English seat in Kent. As Lord Bevis wished to see the work in progress, and was impatient for its completion, my husband, as I have said, was determined to do what we had not hitherto ventured upon—to remain during even the hot months in Rome, working daily in his studio there, and coming out on the Saturday to Monte del Caccia. This was always a favourite place of ours; where also we came for the whole summer, it being so cool and healthy, as well as within such easy reach of Albano. We took, therefore, a large suite of rooms in the villa at the end of the town, near the great Convent of the Redentori, which had been built, a few years before, by the vine-dresser Zuccone, who, from a very poor, ignorant man, had managed, by one means or another, to get money. Here I and my son Fritz, then a boy of twelve, were very pleasantly located.

Being, as I said, within easy distance of Albano, scarcely were we settled at the villa when, one hot afternoon in July, the whole atmosphere laden with the luscious tropical odour of the large magnolia, which grows so abundantly at the Villa Zuccone, Lord Bevis unexpectedly made his appearance to call on me, accompanied by his cousin Monsignor Oliver.

It was so hot indoors; where, to tell you the truth, I was taking my afternoon siesta; yet, at the same time, such a refreshing breeze from the Mediterranean was playing amongst the vine-leaves of the pergola, that I ordered coffee to be immediately served there. It always still remains in my mind as a pleasant picture: the aristocratic, well-nurtured form of Monsignor Oliver, as he sat, in his rich violet soutan, with a background of flame-coloured pomegranate blossom. Lord Bevis, who, on the contrary, was a meagre, spare-looking little man, sat with his countenance irradiated with surprise and delight as he gazed upon the wonderful landscape which spread out before him, the same that we have from our own windows—the glittering Mediterranean; the broad,

outspread, undulating Campagna; Rome in the distance, and the far-off blue mountains, each one with a name which in itself is poetry. It is a marvellous view. I never saw anyone more affected by it than this English lord, who now wished that he had come hither, instead of settling himself at Albano, which had been his ideal of an earthly paradise, until shorn of its glory by comparison with this peculiarly grand, historic landscape.

On this I remarked that it had often astonished me—who always regarded this scenery with the same admiration as his lordship—that his Holiness, when at Castel Gondolfo, within only an easy ride of Monte del Caccia, had never visited it; and thus blessed by his presence his dirty but most devoted subjects. More especially as, just above, was Sopra Monte, whence was a still grander panoramic view, and where stood the Convent of the pious Passionist Brothers.

In reply, Monsignor Oliver expressed the same surprise, adding: "This shall be mentioned to Holy Father, rely upon me. I have no doubt but that the suggestion of so faithful a daughter of the Church will not pass without regard."

The gentlemen, after their coffee, wiled away an hour in conversation, chiefly on the historic sites of the vast landscape, and then rode back through the pleasant chestnut woods, just in time to reach Albano before sunset.

Warm summer weeks glided by, and the conversation of this afternoon almost passed from my mind.

II.

It was September; the hot sun had scorched many of the flowers in the garden; the broad Campagna, stretching below for miles, had become a brown, arid plain; my Fritz studied his Latin grammar in a cool nook of the woods, whilst I led a torpid life indoors. My husband, then absent, having gone to Carrara to select a block of marble for the Honourable Veronica's tomb, had taken the opportunity of a little run to the Bagno de Lucca; the errand for the marble being his excuse with Lord Bevis, who otherwise would have begrudged a week of his time out of Rome.

It was an unusually hot summer, and the cool breezes from the sea came now but as angel-visits, few and far between. Mid-day was a time of slumberous repose, and thus seven o'clock in the morning saw me on my way to early matins.

It was on the 13th of September. I can never forget the day. As I was ascending the long, steep street honoured by the name of the Corso, I saw, to my surprise, Betta, the wife of dirty Checco, the man who is employed to clean the streets on festas, sweeping before her house, as if for dear life.

"What is it all about, Betta?" said I. "Why are you cleaning up thus on a Tuesday?"

"Ah, signora mia," she replied, "do you not know that angels will tread this road to-day?"

"Angels, Betta!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, Holy Father himself is coming, and the angels in his train."

"Nonsense!" said I, a little angry, suddenly recalling the conversation with Monsignor Oliver. I felt that, if it were so, I should have been notified, but at the same time remembered that Holy Father dearly loved to take his children by surprise. The next moment, looking in at the open door of the bakehouse, I saw Nanna, the baker's wife, operating with a pair of curling-irons on the head of her little Susetta.

At sight of me, out she rushed with the curling-irons in her hand, exclaiming: "Ah, Signora Giulia, I was just going to run down to ask you--can you give me some blue ribbon for Susetta's hair?"

"And for what do you want blue ribbon for Susetta's hair?" asked I, angrily.

"Madonna Beatissima!" exclaimed she, "and you not heard the wondrous news! His Holiness condescends to visit Monte del Caccia this blessed morning, and we shall have a procession. My little Susetta, who was such a heavenly Mary Magdalene on Ascension Day, will appear in the same character, and Lalla's Alfonso will go as Giovanni Battisto: the farmacista's wife has sent her again the beautiful white lambskin tippet."

"Who told you, Nanna, that Holy Father was coming? There must be some mistake."

"Lalla told me," returned Nanna. "There's no mistake, signora mea, for Lalla had it from the Sagrestano."

"I will inquire from the Arciprete himself," I said, feeling no little annoyed that, if it really were so, I was the last person to hear of it. Yet I was sorely puzzled. At every step I advanced the general excitement and expectation was evident. White sheets, and red, yellow, and blue curtains and table-cloths were being hung out of the upper windows. There was a greater concourse round the fountain than ever; women and girls fetching water, and snatching away their filled concas as if they had no time to talk; and yet there was a buzz of voices everywhere.

With a proud but somewhat uncomfortable sense of ignoring the truth of this strange rumour, I entered the church, where, I grant, my devotions were a little disturbed when I found myself the only worshipper. Not even blind Girolamo was there, whose boast it was that never for half a century had he missed a single holy office, while the Arciprete himself, very red in the face, and half choked with asthma, hurried through the service, and was gone before I could get a word with him.

At that moment the Sagrestano came forward. "Sense, signora," said he, "but it strikes me as molto curioso to see you here, when so many garlands will be wanted. Why, the Soyelle Pie have been up all night making devices."

"Where is blind Girolamo?" asked I, rather tartly.

"He is following the example of blind Bartimmeo," replied the Sagrestano, intending this for a little joke; "and is now sitting by the road-side to Castel Gondolfo, that the shadow of the Vicar of Christ may fall upon him."

"Vicar of Christ!" repeated I, indignantly. "Why, then, did not the Arciprete send me word?"

"Why did he not?" repeated he; then added, in a half-confidential tone, "I am afraid he is ill. He should see the medico, signora. He will not believe, because the news has come through Salvina, who never goes to confession. Signora, between you and me, there's been a quarrel in the village this very morning between two men about this believing and not believing, and one is badly stabbed. But I say, signora, the best thing is to be ready."

This seemed to be the general sentiment, for, as I made my way back, I encountered everywhere signs of festal preparation. Women at their open windows were arranging their white tavagalia; or were out in the street in their orange or green petticoats, wearing their best coral necklaces and heavy gold ear-rings. Everywhere a loud chattering and a salutation greeted me in passing about Holy Father's visit. Most of the usual beggars, too, had disappeared; gone like Girolamo to receive the passing holy shadow as early as possible; whilst the bed-ridden, the disabled from rheumatism, cramp, or ague were crawling out, or being carried out and placed on the road-side.

And yet, in all this show of excited expectation, the effect of which was both pretty and picturesque, the Villa Zuccone alone remained silent and unadorned. At the door, however, I encountered the stout, sallow-complexioned, but handsome padrona, Signora Mariana, coming in from the garden, where she had been hanging out her washing. She was still in her everyday dress, but looking very flurried and disconcerted. Following close after, was her slender, pretty daughter Pépina, her black eyes full of tears. Signs of despair were in both their countenances at sight of me. Wringing her yet wet hands, the Signora Madre poured out the most voluble abuse against her husband, il stupido Zuccone, who would not believe that Most Holy Father was coming to Monte del Caccia that morning. Everybody else knew he was coming and was getting ready—but Zuccone was an ass!

On this out came Zuccone himself, in a red-hot rage, flourishing his arms, and calling his wife a hundred times an ass for thinking that the Holy Father would do such dishonour to himself and the monsignore as to come unannounced. He swore he would dismiss Roberto and

Enrico, and twenty other men and women, who refused to go that morning to the vineyard, saying they would stay for the benediction. Maladetto!— But his wife, frightened at a curse when the subject was Holy Father's benediction, and knowing as well as everybody else that Zuccone's imprecations, when they once began, were the most diabolical in the village, stopped her ears; saying, as she did so, "Why should they forfeit paradiso for our poor vineyard?" And the husband went out to utter his curses elsewhere.

Pretty Pépina cried, and Belisario, her only brother, stalked into the house, rebellion in the very sound of his footsteps. He had met his father in the court, who had ordered him off to work, and he was come in to put his best things on, and to make ready for whatever might occur.

"And is it not incommoda," said the wife, "that my best sheets are in bucato (in lye). I have not one out if Holy Father comes; and he's sure to come, just because they are in bucato!"

"Perhaps Signor Zuccone is right," replied I. "It may be only an idle report. The Arciprete has heard not a word of it."

"Mamma mia! stupido!" replied the padrona, indignantly. "What a misfortune that Zuccone would build the villa out of the town, so that we never hear any news. The charcoal-burner Salvini and his fellows brought word last night, returning from Rome with their mules by way of Castel Gondolfo. They had it from one of the Pontifical grooms, Ernesto, from Monte del Caccia. He was on the look-out for them, quite white in the face, and perspiration in big drops on his forehead. He implored them, in the name of Madonna and all the saints, to tell the Arciprete and all the pious of Monte del Caccia that his Holiness, who dearly loves a surprise, had ordered his coach and horses for this morning, to take him unexpectedly to the Passionists of Sopra Monte, passing through Monte del Caccia, of course—for how else could he go, signora? And though he might, Ernesto said, endanger his own soul by betraying the secrets of his Holiness, yet, for the credit of his native place, he could not keep silence. So he bade Salvini tell everybody to be ready, for that Holy Father was coming as sure as to-morrow is the day of Santa Eugenia. And though Salvini may be a liar, signora, and never go to confession, yet Ernesto has been half a saint from his boyhood, and might have been one of the Redentore Frati, but that Monsignor Zoppelli took him into the stables of his Holiness."

Here, however, the padrona was interrupted in her voluble talk by the appearance both of Zuccone and the Arciprete at the same moment, coming from different directions; the latter looking hot and very much excited, his snuff-box in one hand, and his large blue cotton pocket-handkerchief in the other.

"The very people I wanted to see," said he. "I'm in the greatest perplexity. The whole town is in revolt: the lowest, most ignorant

rabble rise up against me, insisting that Holy Father, our august and venerable Pontiff, condescends to pass through Monte del Caccia this very day. The women, the children, my very sacristan—nay, the nuns themselves—snap their fingers in my face, and prefer to believe the idle story of a drunken man, who neglects salvation, rather than—what is impossible—that the minister of Holy Church in this place should be left in utter darkness of so important a fact! I have had no breakfast," continued the aggrieved Arciprete. "I sent my housekeeper, without any personal consideration of my own needs, to Sopra Monte, and the Passionists themselves know nothing of it! Your opposite neighbours, the holy Redentori; Fra Angelo, who is a living saint; and Fra Eustachio, whose brother is the maggior-domo of Holy Father himself; know nothing of it. It is a lie of that sinner Salvini's, who seeks to make a laughing-stock of the servant of Holy Church. Holy Father loves surprises, they say, but he does not love to make fools of his devoted servants."

Hearing all this, it struck me that the better plan was to send off Fritz, who was an amazed auditor, and ready at any moment for an adventure, on my donkey, with a note which I would write instantly to Monsignor Oliver; begging him by the sign of the cross, with which I headed my letter, to tell me the truth regarding the rumour of this visit of his Holiness.

The good Arciprete, greatly relieved by this arrangement, went into the house to have breakfast with Zuccone; whilst I, having written my note, saw my son set off on his humble steed, with strict injunctions from me to lose no time by the way; to tie the donkey outside the papal villa; and to return as soon as he got his answer, without a moment's delay.

Zuccone and the Arciprete had scarcely seated themselves at the breakfast-table, when an interruption occurred. The farmacista hurried in, bearing a huge, improvised banner in his arms, on which were displayed the cross-keys in gold paper. This was another sign of the public infatuation, intended to figure at the reception of Holy Father. The banner only lacked a few words of good Latin, which the apothecary, though said to be a Latin scholar, was unable to supply. Therefore he had hurried hither to find the Arciprete and beg his help and the use of my paint-box. The Arciprete, however, would have nothing to do with it, stamped his foot, took snuff, and swallowed his coffee. Which sent the poor farmacista to my room in despair.

By this time I myself had become infested by the public enthusiasm. Whether it were delusion or not, I began with right good will to paint the required inscription, in large red and black letters, and had completed the words "Dominus noster beatissimus, optimus maximus," when, at once lifting my eyes to the window, the brush fell from my hand. For I beheld below, winding up the road through the chestnut

woods in the direction of the house, what, of a truth, could be no other than Pius, Dominus noster, himself!

What became of the farmacista and his banner; what became of the Arciprete; I know not. I only know that Zuccone, waking up to the occasion, seized, in a wild, inconsistent Italian frenzy, upon a broom, and began sweeping the dusty brick-floor of the great vestibule, so that the whole house was filled with a cloud of dust. There was a sudden tumult, for all had at once become aware of the fact that the august cortége was not only advancing towards the town, but was making a divergence directly to the villa.

Whilst Zuccone swept, and whilst dust rose up everywhere in clouds, I rushed into the garden. Snatching at every green leaf and twig, and every remaining autumn flower, I rushed back again and flung them broad-cast over floor and furniture, and then woke up to the fact that I was in my morning cap and dressing-gown, that the pontifical officers of the household, the pontifical medico, and no less than five cardinals on horseback, each attended by his own servant, were in the courtyard, heralding in the great coach with its four horses: Holy Father sitting smiling within the coach, and attendants on horseback behind. I could not take it all in at a glance. But one thing I saw plain enough in the midst of it all: my miserable donkey, with Fritz on his back—impatient to be once more eating his green grass at home—now pushing his way, spite of all the poor lad's efforts to hold him back, at the head of the august procession.

The next thing I saw was Zuccone, who had flung away his broom, and in his hurry pushed me aside also, kneeling at the open carriage door, from which his Holiness was alighting, in his pure white dress, assisted by the Bishop of Tusculum. The next moment, with marvellous presence of mind, assuming that all this honour was out of respect to himself and his house, Zuccone, seizing me by the wrist, drew me forward and presented me as the Signora Giulia. Holy Father, who was in the best of humours, smiled at this, and, holding out his hand to me to be kissed, said, "Conosco bene Signora Giulia" (I know the Signora Giulia very well): whilst Monsignor Oliver whispered in my ear: "You see that the wishes of a pious daughter are not disregarded."

His Holiness ascended the steps to the house, and entered the vestibule. As his tastes are simple; and he has always had, even in his saddest experiences, a keen sense of humour; he smiled as he looked round and perceived the hurried show of decorative order which sought to veil the general disorder; the dust not yet laid. He fairly laughed out when he saw the troubled countenance of my poor Fritz, who was now at my side, and graciously sought to reassure him by a little joke about Balaam and his ass.

It was now intimated to Zuccone that his Holiness, according to

his custom when on an excursion, required to change his linen ; and the proud, supremely happy man had the felicity of standing guard at his own bed-room door whilst this ceremony was performed on the sacred person ; his linen for the occasion being produced from a bag in the care of one of the attendants who followed in the train.

His Holiness now, partly for his own convenience, partly, perhaps, out of kind and condescending favour to a faithful daughter of the Church, and for the credit of the house, in order that time and opportunity should be given for its proper preparation, graciously intimated to me that he would again rest at the villa, and in my apartment, on his return from Sopra Monte.

The pontifical carriages and horses were, therefore, drawn up in the spacious court-yard. The white palfrey used by Holy Father being brought into the inner court, his Holiness mounted, and, attended by the grand array of eminences, departed. The whole town literally flung itself upon its knees, and prostrated itself in the dust ; whilst I, on my part, began to breathe.

III.

But now it was necessary as quickly as possible to collect our senses and prepare for the second act, so to speak, of the drama. We had no time to think about the town, which, as I have said, was wild with devotion and excitement, and on its knees : we had enough to think of and to do within doors. The thoughts of the stout and comely signora and her pretty daughter were, however, about their finery : those of Zuccone about the rinfresco which he wished to offer his Holiness. He now wrung his hands in an agony of despair because his best helper, he said, in the matter, his son Belisario ; seized all at once with a hot enthusiasm for religion ; had hastily assumed his garb of sackcloth with its painted skull and cross-bones, as a Brother of the Purgatorio, and gone off with the whole fraternity, carrying the heavy crucifix in its socco, to attend his Holiness in the grand procession to Sopra Monte. What now could be done to provide a suitable rinfresco ?

My ever ready Fritz, however, though still a little sore about his contretemps with the donkey, came to the rescue. Mounting into Zuccone's carretta, he drove down to Frascati, with orders which I wrote, to bring back from the confectioner's two men, with ices, biscuits, and every needful for the occasion, besides ordering fireworks and a fire-balloon for the evening. This being Zuccone's especial idea, and his expression to the whole world of his delight to honour and his reverence for his great and remarkable guest.

The preparations for the reception of his Holiness at the villa fell entirely to me : neither Zuccone, his wife, nor daughter had any wits

left; and I naturally looked round, as soon as Fritz was gone, with the eye of an upholsterer as to the capabilities of my apartment. Fortunately it was in itself, though very sparely furnished, large and handsome; and as I, by good luck, had purchased from a Jew in the Ghetto, in Rome, an antique arm-chair, which I had, by good luck also, brought here for my summer siestas, this I determined, though the cover was none of the best, nor the seat of the softest, to convert into a throne for Holy Father. Ornaments of any other kind certainly there were none. But, after having arranged flowers, and hung up hastily-made garlands; and by help of a portfolio of my lamented father's drawings, whose slightest efforts have ever drawn forth the approbation of our beloved Pontiff, for whom he executed a series of designs now in the Vatican; the large room began to assume a festal appearance. Full of satisfaction so far, I now turned my attention to the seat of honour: the only seat necessary in the apartment.

For this purpose I hastened across to the Convent of the Redentores, feeling sure that the Holy Brothers of the Trinity would gladly assist me with some of their sacred draperies. But for once I had counted without my host. Fra Angelo, good man, answered me somewhat snappishly, saying that they needed all for the sudden decoration of their chapel, seeing that Holy Father would bless it and them on his return. Fra Eugenio, Fritz's Latin teacher, who was fixing the heavy wax candles in their sockets, whispered me in passing to wait a little. I waited, then followed him by a back way to the vestry, where Fra Eustacio, with a little sigh, yielded up to me an armful of yellow silk damask, with which I stepped away no little satisfied: understanding clearly enough that the Prior was not over well pleased that Holy Father would refresh himself at the Villa Zuccone, instead of in the refectory of the sacred Redentori.

My old chair was soon transformed into one of regal state. A pillow was laid upon the hard seat, a footstool was improvised, and the whole covered and draped in the completest manner; a piece of gold brocade, on which, as it happened, the Papal arms were wrought, conspicuously shining forth on the back.

All this done, I had still ample time to attend to my own toilet and that of Fritz, who returned in triumph with his two men. These I now left in possession of my saloon to cover the empty table with most elegant rinfrescamento.

Presently the clanging of all the bells in Monte del Caccia announced that his Holiness was on his descent from Sopra Monte. From the loggia on the roof, where we all betook ourselves: the Zuccone family in the highest festal array, and Zuccone himself quite unstable on his feet, as if fairly drunk with proud excitement: we beheld the descending train, first winding slowly down the ancient Via Triumphalis, leading from the lofty white convent, a long

procession. We could discern banners, crosses, and sacred baldochini; the diversified garbs of various fraternities; the black-habited Passionists; and then a long train of peasant people in their festal attire. After awhile, again the procession appeared, now in larger dimensions, at the top of the Corso, on the church platform. Here the Brethren of the Holy Trinity, who had ascended from their monastery below, in their habits of pure white flannel, presented to his Holiness an address, in the name of the town, which had been rapidly cobbled up, in very bad Latin, by the Prior himself, and in which all the inhabitants of Monte del Caccia, old and young, vowed eternal fidelity to Holy Church.

No one can imagine the glorious solemnity of the scene (said Signora Giulia, with a suddenly altered tone of voice, and the tears starting to her eyes); it was a scene of heavenly radiance. Holy Father, twenty years younger than now, seated on his snow-white led horse; his countenance beaming with a celestial benignity, extending his hands in blessing over the kneeling throng, which had gathered as by magic from all the hills and towns around: Frascati and Marino, Gensano and Grotto Ferrata; from the heights of Hannibal's camp; from the solitudes of Nemi: regardless of their dress; all seized, as it were, with a frenzy to behold his Holiness and to receive his blessing. The open spaces before the church and round the fountain, and all the long breadth of the Corso, were paved, as it were, with prostrate human forms; men, women, and little children; through which the sacred procession now slowly descended: Holy Father, with benignity on his face, pouring out his blessing upon them as he went. It was, in fact, the most gorgeous and real Corpus Domini procession that we ever had; for the Arciprete, having collected his wits, had concluded that the best precedent for this memorable occasion was that of this favourite festa; especially as he wished to show that, though Monte del Caccia was poor in a worldly sense, yet it was rich in sacred treasures. Thus the golden umbrella and the yellow baldochino of cloth of gold, and all the other paraphernalia of the church, were made manifest; whilst the matrons and girls formed themselves into their various holy societies, and the men dropped into the ranks of the two fraternities of Purgatorio and Miserecordia. First and foremost of the latter came Pompeii, the opulent and fat fuzzicagnolo, or cheesemonger, with his bald, bare head. He had toiled up and down Sopra Monte at the risk of a sunstroke or apoplexy, of which, good man, he never thought during this work of salvation; especially as, in the descent from the convent, he contrived a momentary halt before his shop, which was ornamented with buffalo-cheeses, hams, and chaplets of bay. Holy Father, eager to gratify or countenance the efforts of these simple folk, lifted up his arms in benediction, whilst the afternoon sun, shining now full upon him through an opening in the houses, seemed to add radiance to his

gracious countenance and a fresh brightness to his white and golden garments.

So the long and solemnly benignant procession moved slowly down the Corso between the prostrate masses. And, strange to say, in the front of all marched the poor half-witted hermit of Santa Maria della Rocca, carrying a rude crucifix in his arms. After him came the Brothers of the Holy Trinity, chanting their psalteries. On they came. The advance of the procession passed the Villa Zuccone. Then a halt was made.

The villa, now swept and garnished, was filled with a warm breath of incense, and Holy Father and their Eminences crossed the threshold. Before long he was seated in the chair of state; when Zuccone, in his black suit, having already prostrated himself before his Holiness, again came forward, and presented his wife and daughter, in their black silk dresses and black veils, to kiss the gold-embroidered cross on the papal slipper. After which, seizing my hand, as I knelt apart from them, with Fritz by my side, he strove to lead me forward for the same ceremony, again saying, with some importunity, "La Signora Giulia, il Signor Federigo!" On which Holy Father replied, almost impatiently: "Vi dico conosco molto bene la Signora Giulia e suo figlio." Then, turning to me with a smile in which was an expression of dry humour, he said, "Ah, my poor dear Passionists! I've loosened their tongues to-day. They will to-day talk so much about their Papa that Calvary will be forgotten!" Graciously giving me his hand to kiss, I retired.

The rinfresco having been duly served, ices, coffee, and biscuits were handed round and partaken of. His Holiness, having blessed the house, departed, one short quarter of an hour sufficing for this important event. And his Holiness, having spoken a benediction in the decorated chapel of the Redemptorists across the road, passed away like a magnificent dream.

IV.

But it was no dream to Zuccone. Those two short quarters of an hour; the coming and going of the Sovereign Pontiff; were the turning points in his life. He could think and talk of nothing else.

He was, in the first instance, almost before his Holiness had returned to Castel Gondolfo; peremptory in his desire to purchase the chair which had been so much honoured that day. But money would not tempt me; the chair had ceased to be an ordinary chair also to me. I was resolute in retaining it; I have it still, and it is, in fact, that in which you are seated at this moment.

(I rose and looked at the chair, now covered with its faded old brown damask, but no way superior to any other piece of furniture in the

room. It was, however, like Signora Giulia herself, rich in experiences, which its homely exterior would not have led one to expect. I reseated myself and she continued:)

The Arciprete, good man, swallowing his mortification and discomfiture, preached on the following Sunday a somewhat startling sermon; to me, at least; inasmuch as he spoke of the surprise which his Holiness and himself had prepared for the people of Monte del Caccia, dilating largely on the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem. He said, likewise, that a marble tablet, commemorative of the great event, must be let into the external wall of Villa Zuccone, so that it might be read by all, and known to all future generations.

This was a hint to Zuccone, on whom nothing which could contribute to his greatness was lost. He, however, without regard either to the public or posterity, at once ordered this marble tablet at his own expense. It was inserted in the wall of the saloon which I occupied, where his Holiness was entertained, and announced to all posterity that "Il sommo Pontefice Pius IX., when visiting the monks of Sopra Monte, on Sept. 13th, 1852, attended by many illustrious Eminences, deigned to repose himself twice in this room, blessing and permitting the family of Cavaliere Tomaso Zuccone, the founder of this house, to kiss his sacred foot; and that in perpetual remembrance of this, he has had this marble placed in the wall."

But now observe: this Zuccone, only on the very day of this illustrious visit, was an ignorant vine-striper. Poor he was born, but, partly by industry, and partly, it was said, by accident, he had made money and built this house. His children were ignorant, and bred to toil; his wife, a contadina, washed her own linen; and Zuccone himself had not apparently an idea beyond his vineyard and olive-grounds. Now, however, he is a Cavaliere and a nobleman, and in this it is that consists the Freak of Fortune.

The very morning after the eventful 13th of September the half-witted hermit-priest of Maria della Rocca, meeting Zuccone, addressed him as il Signor Cavaliere.

"What is the meaning of that?" asked Zuccone, speaking gruffly, as was his custom.

The poor old hermit, thinking that he had some way unwittingly done wrong, apologised; saying he thought he must be so, because he knew, when he was a boy, a mercante di campagna who, owing to a passing visit of Pius VII. to his house, became ennobled, both him and his family.

This was enough for Zuccone. He at once set off to an avocato, or lawyer, in Rome; who, scarcely investigating the matter, assured him that he, the simple vine-dresser, was ennobled by the Papal visit, and raised to the rank of Cavaliere.

Never was there a more complete Freak of Fortune; but, as Fortune's

favours are not always blessings, so was it in this case. From that day he was an altered man.

Fortunately the period for which we had taken the rooms in the villa soon expired, and we were spared the ludicrous annoyance of his bombastic airs. The day we left he intimated to us that henceforth he should occupy the whole villa himself, though he would be happy to see us for a day or so as visitors. At the same time he informed us that his carretiere, or carter, who took our luggage to Rome, would bring back some of the new furniture which he had ordered, all of which, he said, he had had emblazoned with the Zuccone arms. This was very amusing, as Zuccone, very soon after his greatness dawned upon him, had had himself announced to my husband in his studio in Rome as il Cavaliere. My husband, ready for any joke, flattered him to the top of his bent, and there and then designed for him the Zuccone arms—a big pumpkin vert on a field gules. So now the grand furniture, duly emblazoned, was to come back with the carretiere who took our luggage.

For more than a year we saw nothing more of the great Pumpkin family, for our villa was not then built, and the following summer we spent in Germany. But the family greatness and dignity had not added to the happiness of Signora Mariana and her children. Young Belisario, taken from his labours in the vineyard and olive-ground and his dignity as a confrère of the Purgatorio, was sent to college in Rome. He wore a long cloak and a white cravat, and had his father's commands to perfect himself into a young Roman gentleman. The poor little fluttering Pépina was torn from her mother's side and sent to a convent, to learn to speak French and to embroider; instead of working amongst the vines and olives, with every now and then a tender word or a loving glance over the rose-hedge from young Giacomo Fioretti, of the neighbouring vineyard. The union between these young people had been arranged between their mothers ever since Pépina was in swaddling-bands.

It was not till the Carnival of the following spring that I again saw the Cavaliere Zuccone, who now, in accordance with his superb notions, was here to make merry during the otto giorno del Paradiso, as the Italians call the eight days of the Carnival. This he did by driving up and down the Corso in a handsome open carriage, pelting the grandees with confetti and the ladies with flowers, now considering himself one of their class. Never did man make himself more ridiculous, yet flatter himself, at the same time, that he was the pink of nobility. He smoked Havannah cigars; he wore a gold eye-glass; and wound up every night with the theatre and the masked ball. He was completely changed. No less so was the stout, good-tempered Mariana. The parting with her children, and, above all, her daughter, had been a great trouble to her; she had grown thin and heavy-hearted; and, on the Friday in Carnival week, suddenly made her appearance in our rooms,

looking anything but carnivalesque. She was come to ask me to go with her to buy damask table-linen, which her husband considered indispensable for their greatness. She shed tears over the silken-textured material; deploring that she could now neither starch nor iron, to say nothing of washing; and then over the thought of her poor little Pépina, who was so consumata, wasted away to nothing; whilst the worthy Giacomo Fioretti—whose father was a sensible man, adding vineyard to vineyard—had been insulted in their own house, friend of the family as he had been for years, by Zuccone himself. And as to poor Belisario—here was another trouble! he had suffered all sorts of indignities at the college; had run away, and was now at Monte del Caccia; had come whilst his father was at the Carnival, who, therefore, knew nothing of it. But Belisario declared he would not go back; he would enlist for a soldier; do anything rather than be made a fine gentleman of. Finally came the grand trouble of all: Zuccone was an altered man; he spent and spared nothing; his only thought was to do as the nobility did; his vineyard and his olive-ground, which had hitherto been his pride, were now neglected; he walked about in his Sunday coat every day in the week, and did nothing, because he was il Cavaliere!

It was not a merry Carnival to the poor Signora. Though she was allowed to visit her daughter in the convent, that only increased her trouble; for Pépina's eyes were red with weeping, and she could not tell her grief to her mother, because Sister Loretta would not leave them together for a minute. How, therefore, could it be a merry Carnival?

V.

Again it was summer (said Signora Giulia, raising from her lap the letter which had first reminded her of this family history, and which she had been holding between her fingers all the time). This letter is directed to the Benconosciuto Scultore Grünwald, in Rome. The writer, il Cavaliere Zuccone, addressing him as the egregio signore, says that; regarding it as needful, considering his rank in life, to prepare his family tomb or monument; he desires to have his bust taken and executed in marble by the said egregio signore, hoping that five hogsheads of his best wine, that is to say of the vintage of 1846, would be considered as an equivalent.

My husband was so incensed by the arrogance and presumption of the writer that he threw the letter aside in indignation, and certainly would have taken no notice of it, had not a little note, in the poorest of handwriting; which, however, I recognized as that of Signora Mariana; been left at our house a day or two afterwards by the veritable Salvini, of noted charcoal memory. This note entreated my husband as a Christian to take Zuccone's bust, seeing that things were going on very badly at the villa. Her husband, she said, had obstinately

set his mind, not only on having it done, but done in their own house. Therefore she entreated them to send over some day and come with the good Signora, so that she might open her breaking heart to them: for though forestiere, she could trust them better than Italians, who were so treacherous.

Out of pity, therefore, to the poor heart-broken wife, we went again to the Villa Zuccone. And though we never saw the five hogsheads of wine, I always considered it especially fortunate that we did so, because it gave us the opportunity of purchasing the beautiful site upon which, the following year, we began to build our own villa—this pleasant country home where we now are, and which became such a source of interest and enjoyment to my dear father as long as he lived.

My husband, in his good nature, not only modelled the bust of il Cavaliere, but, according to his own wish, made him look twenty years younger than he was, and represented him in the uniform of the Guardia Nobili, or Papal Guard. So assiduous was the poor wife to make us comfortable that he modelled her also; not as she was then, with all those lines of anxiety and worry on her comely countenance; but as she had appeared two summers before, a fine type of the contadina, become, by good fortune, a signora.

Everything, as the poor woman said, had gone wrong with them since Holy Father's visit had made il Cavaliere of her husband. Even the vine-disease, which had not hitherto been at all prevalent in that district, had nearly destroyed their whole vintage the last year. The olive crop had also failed, and the last summer had been so dry that they had hardly any hay, which hitherto had been one of the most remunerative harvests to her husband. In spite of all these losses, and the growing shortness of money, he would not let any portion of the villa to the forestiere, who, as usual, when the summer heat becomes oppressive in Rome, flee out to the hills, and to whom the handsome Villa Zuccone, situated on the very top of Monte del Caccia, was always attractive. No; all the last summer it had stood unoccupied, though more families than usual inquired after it.

Mariana loved to have forestiere in the villa, independently of the money they brought, because she was kind-hearted and socially inclined; and I fortunately hit upon the only argument with her husband that could have any weight with him. The Roman princes Borghese, Sciarra, and many others, let apartments in their palaces; why, then, should il Cavaliere refuse? He consented, therefore; and, to the infinite satisfaction of poor Signora Mariana, a wealthy American family were located in our apartment that very summer.

In other respects, also, our visit was productive of good. We espoused the cause of young Giacomo Fioretti; we played dominoes with Fra Eustacio, Zuccone's director; and so, I believe, became instrumental in the final act of this little drama.

We never, as I have said, saw the five hogsheads of wine; but then events in the Zuccone family wound themselves up very rapidly. Money worries, quarrels, and all kind of annoyances came down like an armed force on poor, foolish Zuccone, who fell that same autumn into fever, which carried him off in three days. On the last afternoon of his life, after Fra Eustacio had administered extreme unction, poor little Pépina, who had now been some days from the convent, was betrothed to good Giacomo.

The Cavaliere was now dead and buried. You have seen his tomb in the church with its pompous Latin inscription, in which the visit of his Holiness is not omitted. The busts of himself and his wife were never put into marble; they remain, however, in their places of honour each on their respective pedestal, under the famous marble inscription which ennobles the saloon.

The Signora Mariana again washed her own linen, fed her fowls, and let the principal rooms in her house to forestiere; and, finally might once more be heard singing under the vine-covered pergola. She had now good reason to be contented, for the family vineyards were again well cultivated. Giacomo Fioretti, to the comfort of her heart, undertook the stewardship. Belisario, influenced by the one good seed sown in his mind during his short and humiliating experience in the Roman college, went for a few years to study the improved management of the vine in Tuscany. He returned with a practical knowledge which soon made the vineyards of Zuccone and Fioretti; now well-fed and middle-aged men; the most famous on the southern side of Rome: and for which, I am told, only this last year, in the competition amongst the vinegrowers obtained no less than two gold medals.

It is now twenty years since the important event occurred which made the greatness and the downfall of Zuccone the elder; but Holy Father still remembers, with no little merriment, this Freak of Fortune. Only on the last festa of St. Peter and St. Paul, when I went to the Vatican to offer my homage to the great successor of St. Peter, he said to me, with that dry little laugh which all his familiars know so well:

"Ah, poor Cavaliere Tomaso! Let us hope we shall find him in Paradiso!"

THE DOMESTIC NOVEL.

IN this third and last paper I repeat what I said in my first: that novels to-day seem to occupy the same place in literature that the plays of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson and Marlowe held in the Elizabethan era. And as we always find the manners and tastes of the age reflected in its popular amusements, so the free, manly, and adventurous spirit of Englishmen in those stirring times awakened the genius of the dramatic writers, and inspired their pages with noble actions and glowing deeds. The comedies of the reign of Charles the Second, as we might expect to find if this rule be true, abound with licentiousness and profanity. Though not wanting in brilliancy and wit, the extreme coarseness of the language and the shamelessness of the immorality render the revival of any of the plays of this age utterly impossible at the present day.

And so with the novels of these times of our forefathers. One reason why the older novelists are not so much read now is, because people to-day will not endure the gross coarsness of language and customs which so generally disfigure almost every page. Sir Walter Scott, referring to Mrs. Aphra Behn, whose novels were once very popular, but have long since ceased to be read, says—"The editor was acquainted with an old lady of family who assured him that in her younger days Mrs. Behn's novels were as currently upon the toilette-table as the works of Miss Edgeworth at present; and described with some humour her own surprise when, the book falling into her hands after a long interval of years, she found it impossible to endure at the age of fourscore what at fifteen she, like all the fashionable world of the time, had perused without an idea of impropriety."

The public now, like the old lady, has ceased to read *coarse* books, and will no longer tolerate them. Smollett's heroes are quite as coarse as Fielding's, but yet "Roderick Random" and "Peregrine Pickle" are not quite so bad as "Tom Jones." Yet Mr. Sala tells us that everybody has quite forgotten Miss Austen; that Richardson is "as dead as a door-nail;" and that Fielding alone, of all our old novelists, survives in "Tom Jones"; though it seems that he was "less a novelist than the author of an astounding philosophical exposition of human nature;" perhaps as mistaken a remark as has ever been made about Fielding, who, when he wrote "Tom Jones," was as much thinking of "propounding an astounding philosophical exposition" as Cervantes, when drawing the picture of Don Quixote, imagined, according to Sismondi, that he was describing the "eternal contrast between the spirit of poetry and that of prose." In "Peregrine Pickle" Smollet's sea cha-

racters are perhaps a little caricatured, but the sketch of Tom Bowling, in "Roderick Random," will always be regarded in every age as a happy exhibition of those naval heroes to whom Britain is so deeply indebted for her happiness and glory.

In looking back at these times, it always strikes one with the idea of a want of domestic comfort. How dreadfully stiff and hard are the chairs on which our grandfathers and grandmothers loved to repose! Certainly they could never have suffered from the agony described by Pope, of being "stretched on the back of a too easy chair." Sofas and couches, now so universal, were almost unknown. How much more strictly observed, too, was the domestic rule! Children then used to be managed by their parents with much stiffness and formality. Even in Miss Austen's time this system was much in fashion, and we hear of great boys and girls being treated in a way that would be highly unsatisfactory to the young gentlemen and ladies of the present day.

Before leaving the days of Fielding and Smollett, there is one other name which cannot be passed by, so well known was it in its time, and so powerfully has its influence displayed itself lately on the genius of one of the greatest of our modern writers of fiction. The man I refer to is Laurence Sterne. If Fielding was a favourite with Mr. Thackeray, and if he has painted his character with too light a hand, I think he has been too severe in his portrait of Laurence Sterne. In his "Lectures on the English Humorists" he has drawn Sterne in the darkest shade, describing him as the man "who could moralize over a dead ass while he left his own mother to starve." It is true that he did make sentimental speeches to donkeys; but Sterne is not the only author who has taken a *donkey* into his confidence. It may, indeed, be almost said that it is a donkey which forms the "connecting link," or at any rate appears as the "mutual friend," between Sterne and Bulwer. It will doubtless recur to the recollection of the reader that "My Novel" begins with an address of Parson Dale to the tinker's donkey by the parish stocks, which the old squire has just had beautifully restored and painted. Instead, however, of giving the animal a macaroon, as Sterne did at Lyons, the parson bestows on the donkey a fine apple, which he had been carrying in his pocket to give to the best boy in the parish school. At last the tinker, who has always been in the habit of keeping in his bag, besides matches, a number of Chartist tracts, gets transported by his ungrateful country, which fails to appreciate the success with which he has taught the logical connection between Chartism and setting fire to the squire's wheat-stacks. As the tinker is being taken away from the dock, the parson, remembering his old friend, asks him, with tearful eyes, "what has become of his poor donkey?" The tinker replied, with a horrible grin, "Sausages."

But we must not linger over this melancholy and touching subject. An old writer, Cornelius Agrippa, argues for the superiority of women over men, because Adam signifies *earth*; but Eve, being interpreted, means *life*. And we are often reminded that Adam was formed out of the dust of the earth, but Eve out of the living flesh; that Adam was created no one knows where, but that Eve was born in the Garden of Eden. And so, when the influence of women began to assert a powerful force upon our literature, it was naturally supposed that we might expect to find within it an evident access of refinement. And, generally, perhaps this is the case. We have, it is true, our dark shades in the picture; yet, notwithstanding, it is a fact that the more prominent place of late years given to women in our novels has been productive of some of the most beautiful characters and scenes, such, indeed, as the literature of any age and country might feel proud to possess.

Richardson was the first writer who introduced the female element prominently as a heroine into the novel. But of Richardson I am not going to say much, having scarcely any personal acquaintance with him; and from the few pages I have looked at, he appears to me an exceedingly lengthy and rather prosy old gentleman. Of his three great works, "Pamela" was the first in order of time, and "Clarissa Harlowe" the most celebrated in point of merit. We may trace the influence of Richardson's mode of novel writing in the Journals of Madame D'Arblay, better known as Miss Burney. His style also may be perceived in Goldsmith's delightful "Vicar of Wakefield," with its simple Moses and benevolent Parson Primrose.

But among the readers of fiction at the present day, when there are so many new claimants for popular favour daily springing up, how few are there who can confess any acquaintance with such writers as Mrs. Inchbald, Mrs. Opie, Lady Morgan, Miss Edgeworth, and a host of others. Yet all these writers have left works of great literary merit, and far better worth reading than many favourites of the present hour. Miss Edgeworth, indeed, had genius and facility enough to strike out a path of her own. She wrote with the greatest ease, like Madame de Staël, in the very midst of conversation, and at the same time with the greatest care. Yet, perhaps, with the exception of some of her children's books, such as "Rosamund," "Harry and Lucy," and others, how little is known of her works now. This neglect may in part be owing to her great love of giving instruction on every subject. Any decided attempt at moral teaching in a fictitious narrative is quite out of place. When anyone takes up a novel, he usually expects to be *amused*, and if, instead of a story, he fell in with an essay inculcating a religious or a scientific principle, he would probably throw aside the book in disgust, or fortify himself with that respectful kind of apathy with which people undergo a regular sermon, preparing themselves as they do to swallow

a dose of medicine, endeavouring to get it down in large gulps, without tasting it more than is necessary.

Miss Austen may be better remembered than Miss Edgeworth, though Mr. Sala, to use his own elegant metaphor, says "she is as dead as a door-nail." Concealed under the quiet obscurity of domestic life, few women of equal genius and fame were so little known, even in their own day, as Jane Austen. Her contemporaries give us little or no information concerning her. Sir Walter Scott, writing to Miss Baillie, asks her if she knows "Miss Austen, authoress of some novels which have a great deal of nature in them; nature in ordinary and middle life, to be sure, but valuable from its strong resemblance and correct drawing." Sir Walter, indeed, had a great admiration for this lady's writings. He was constantly finding himself, as he says, "with one of her books in his hands." Among the characteristics of Miss Austen's style there is not the faintest trace of the sensational. Her region, and in it she reigns unequalled, is that of the commonplace. The grand, the heroic, the generous, the devoted escaped her, or at least were beyond her power; but the simple good, the dull, the lively, the mean, the coarse, the selfish, the frivolous she saw, and painted with a touch so fine that we often do not perceive its severity. She was satisfied with life and society as she saw them around her. Her men and women are neither very good nor very bad. They pass along the even tenor of their way without falling into any scenes of gloomy interest or great danger. And in this respect she is very much like Mrs. Gaskell, whose death, not long ago, all lovers of the domestic novel so deeply deplored. We find in both these ladies the same characteristics. All the remarks just made upon Miss Austen apply equally well to Mrs. Gaskell, and might be illustrated by examples from her last charming tale, "Wives and Daughters."

A passing allusion must be made to Thackeray, whose pictures of English life and manners are without rival in their way. Only to take as a sample "Vanity Fair," which the author himself considered the best of his works, what a fund of minute observation and refined sarcasm runs through the whole story! His mode of narration consists in a series of pictures, after the manner of Hogarth. And yet there is not a single perfect character in "Vanity Fair." Becky Sharp, the unprincipled governess, has often been unduly detested, while Amelia Sedley, a most insipid creature, has been too highly praised. Then Captain Dobbin is overdrawn: all that can be said in his favour is that he is a good-natured booby. Two of the most powerfully drawn sketches in the volume are decidedly the portraits of the Marquis of Steyne and Sir Pitt Crawley. Indeed, it is the aristocracy which furnishes most of the villains in Thackeray's novels, whilst the good characters come from the ranks of the middle class and the poor. It is worth observing how extremely little conversational matter enters

into this tale, showing that the writer's strength lay not in the ordinary groove of the novelist, but in those far rarer powers, an acute penetration of motives, an abhorrence of sham or pretence, and a true and genuine humour.

One of the faults we hear most often brought against Thackeray is founded on the charge that he is a *mannerist*. But with the exception of a few such world-wide names as Homer, Shakespeare, and Goethe, where is the writer who is not a mannerist? Macaulay, Tennyson, and Carlyle all come under this same charge; and, indeed, to say that an author was not a mannerist, to a certain extent, would be to take away his individuality. Perhaps the weak point in Thackeray may lie in the want of *variety* among his characters. Mention a few types of humanity, and we have them nearly all. Unlike Shakespeare, he has no ideal on which to lavish his illusions, and no visions to fascinate the aspirations of the young. A few gouty, bad-tempered, and dissolute old gentlemen, like Major Pendennis and Lord Ringwood; a few noisy, crafty, vulgar Irish widows, like Mrs. Mackenzie; and a few more male and female fools and sharpers, and we have the whole dramatis personæ before us. Mr. Charles Dickens, again, his nearest competitor, is much more successful in drawing variety of character, and he has created certain types of existence which are as familiar to everyone as "household words." But all Dickens's most powerful creations belong to *low life*. Were he to have attempted to trespass upon the ground where Thackeray was greatest, how utterly would he have failed! Were Thackeray's works to cease to be read as pictures of society, they would still retain their place in English literature, from the singular beauty of their style. And this is saying a great deal, for it is style, indeed, rather than matter, which often keeps alive a literary reputation. In Dickens's characters there is often a humour which seems forced, and in many of his later productions the mannerism is so violent as almost to withdraw them from the region of reality, and make us regard them rather as speaking abstractions or animated machines.

No one can draw young ladies of the period so skilfully as Mr. Anthony Trollope. He has the art of making his characters seem quite like real persons. We get to know them so well that we almost cease to regard them as mere creatures of the imagination. Tilly Dale and John Eames, Mr. Crosbie and the old Squire are talked about as if they were actually alive. Certainly Mrs. Proudie is far too distinctly impressed upon our mind's eye to be only a fictitious personage. One can fancy she is speaking. One hears her loud, decided voice laying down the law to some curate, and sees the poor Bishop trembling under the sway of that terrific woman. Behold her down early on the Sunday morning in her dressing-gown, conducting family prayers with the assistance of the chaplain. She allows the clergyman to read the

service, but she gives the blessing *herself*. Archdeacon Grantly also, what a life-like sketch of an old Church and State dignitary; how angry it would have made him could he have beheld the disestablishment of the Irish Church! And the excellent Lady Lupton, who likes to play the part of Bishopess as well as Mrs. Proudie, but who never, like Mrs. Proudie, transgresses the bounds of good manners.

I have already often referred to Lord Lytton in these papers—perhaps too often—but I cannot omit to mention that accomplished writer's most delightful domestic novel—"What will He Do with It?" History and biography set before us many great and noble characters. We read how men have boldly encountered dangers and perils to save others; but there are few deeds so heroic as that performed by the poor, persecuted, generous, noble Waife. In him we have the picture of a father who, for the sake of saving his good-for-nothing son, Losely, from the punishment which he had justly incurred by committing a daring robbery, places himself in his son's place, and endures with cheerfulness all the social penalties which fall so terribly on the head of a convicted felon.

Time would fail me were I to speak of George Eliot's novels; nor is the close of a paper the proper place to begin; but it is impossible to avoid a passing glance at "Middlemarch." Here is a book describing every-day life in a country place just as it is. The ordinary people stand before us just as we see them any day—the loquacious squire—the pompous banker—the rival doctors, old and young—the fast youth of the country town—the idle, accomplished artist, and the attendant female element necessary to make up the dramatis personæ. Yet though the characters seem the same as here enumerated, there is nothing in the way of managing this literary drama in the least like Miss Austen's or Mrs. Gaskell's method of treatment. We find no descriptive minutiæ of their various traits of character, such as Miss Austen delighted to paint. In a few prefatory remarks the author gives the key-note to the whole story. She wishes to make us understand that her characters in these pages stand out first before us ordinary parts of an insignificant society, but each with his or her varied future before them. Some of the philosophy in this novel, of which there is a good deal, may perhaps at times be rather too transcendental. But still it is the work of a great genius, and another volume added to the noble series of English works of fiction.

And now I must furl my sails, and bring my drifting boat to harbour. I fear that the heading of this article has not been very closely observed in the remarks that have been made; but as this is the last word to be said on the subject, it seemed impossible to resist the temptation of taking the wings of the bee, and wandering for a few moments over the various other flowers in the garden of fiction. Much honey may not have been gathered; many a flower must be left to blush unseen: but it does not seem to me to be an altogether un-

profitable employment sometimes to try and see what is the sort of reading which is most generally popular among people at present. Doubtless a great change has taken place in the last few years. No one now speaks of novels in the same style of indifferent contempt that was the fashion not long ago. In literature, as in painting, both the landscape and incident style are strictly represented by similar modes of thought and feeling in the English mind. They mark the art of this century not less distinctly than religious subjects mark that of the fourteenth. Society and nature are at present contemplated through a very different medium from that in use at the beginning of the century. Whatever may be the cause of this, whether springing from the more familiar converse with nature in her loveliness and beauty, or greater facilities which enable men to travel readily, or for whatever other reason, it is certainly true that till lately we knew nothing of that new world of literature and poetry which the noble minds of such men as Scott, Shelley, and Byron have disclosed to our view. No one now talks of the sin of novel reading.

Where are we to look, if not to novels, for the truest and most highly finished pictures of English life? What could make up to us for the loss of such writers as Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot, and Sir Walter Scott? How often do we hear a worse sermon than that which Parson Dale delivered to his village congregation as we read it in the pages of "My Novel?" And how usefully do we often find a knowledge of novels come to our help in society! In the course of 19th century life we meet with seasons when various persons, more or less known to each other, meet together for the purpose of celebrating certain social rites, and when it is absolutely necessary, if the ceremonies in question are to be successfully conducted, that the celebrants should engage in what is sometimes called "conversation," or more familiarly "talk." Let us suppose two people who are unacquainted with each other placed together at a dinner-party. They have got to sit side by side for the next two hours, and probably would find it (at any rate we may suppose one of the two would) rather dull to keep silence all that time. But what are they to talk about? Art, pictures and music, travelling, dancing, croquet, archery, all have been tried and found wanting; when, by some lucky chance, a novel has been mentioned, and then at last a subject has been found mutually interesting to both parties. And surely it is more harmless, if not quite so delightful, to pass this time in criticising some fictitious character than in making remarks upon living friends, or satirical comments upon our next-door neighbours!

And now, if our criticisms have been vague, and our end apropos to nothing, still the writer's ambition will have been fully gratified if he has not utterly failed in amusing for a brief moment the indulgent attention of the readers of the ARGOSY.

E. B.

LADY ARABELLA.

THE Lady Arabella Grahame was two-and-twenty. The cold-blooded manner in which Debrett gives dates, where the ages of unfortunate peeresses are concerned, makes any reticence on this point useless. There is no possibility of giving a personal description of any significance except by comparisons; so I will tell you that since the famous Duchess of Marlborough no Englishwoman ever possessed such beautiful hair or so firm a determination to have her own way. Lady Hester Stanhope was not more eccentric; and as the young lady's income was immense, she was able to gratify her whims to any extent. She was the despair of guardians, of governesses, and of the whole troop of relations who wished to mould her into a decorous demoiselle of society; yet those whom she chose to conciliate could not help idolizing her. Towards her nobody could hold half feelings. She was extreme, and made others so where she was concerned.

I want you to understand how womanly and fascinating Arabella Grahame could be, how kind and generous she was at heart; or else you will condemn her as utterly unfeminine in the caprices which had made her celebrated from London to St. Petersburg. She actually kept a betting-book; and she drove both lovers and relatives to despair by the summary way in which she rejected the most eligible offers.

The wilful young lady had thought it hard enough to be worried by her kinsmen's interference, while still under tutelage; but she resented bitterly the advice and animadversions wherewith they pursued her after her majority; especially on each occasion that she threw away some great match.

This spring, and she was now twenty-two, the whole clan, from the noble Earl who headed the family down to the poorest hanger-on, was shocked and outraged by her disdaining a ducal coronet laid at her feet. The troop teazed her to such an extent that she deserted London. Accompanied by her ancient governess, her pet vassals, and her Irish mare, "Spitfire," the handsomest and worst-tempered brute outside Pluto's stables, she set sail for France, and descended like a golden-haired Aurora upon Paris. Now, the Lady Arabella detested the "city of all delights," and had an old-fashioned British scorn for everything Gallic; but as she said to her old instructress:

"Purgatory in peace is better than Paradise made a howling wilderness by one's relations."

Mrs. Mocourt looked depressed by these irreverent comparisons, and said something about "the family."

"My family!" retorted her ladyship; "why, I'd rather have hyenas

for cousins than mine. A jungle tiger would be preferable, as an uncle, to old Faulconbridge."

"My dear!" expostulated Mrs. Mocourt, "there is not a more delightful man in the world than the Earl; such perfect manners, such ——"

"I vote for the tiger," interrupted Lady Arabella; "he'd eat me up and have done. But my uncle wants to sell me to be baited, tortured, bound down, tied up, hampered, berated, be——"

"My dearest child!"

"Oh, I don't care! I dare say it's fast and wicked. So much the better! I vow, I'm driven out of my senses; and unless you want to send me to a mad-house, please don't mention marriage or uncles in my hearing again."

"Indeed, I will not," replied the old lady, frightened into temporary submission.

"And mind, we will do everything they call wrong, because it's sure to be enjoyable," pursued Lady Arabella. "We will! If you put on that shocked look, Mrs. Mocourt, I'll dress in boy's clothes, and dance at Mabille; shoot peas at the public, and sing the Marseillaise in the opera-house! Be warned in time, you old darling!"

So Lady Arabella did just what she would. She rode her demon-haunted Irish mare in the Bois de Boulogne, snubbed every English acquaintance who called upon her, was oblivious of the British Ambassadress's invitations, sent back her relatives' letters unopened, and finally caused the family hair to stand on end by a scorching note to the Earl.

The epistle was read in full family conclave by the Earl: and the spirit of prophecy seemed to enter his soul.

"What," said his lordship, "can be expected of the common herd when the daughter of an almost royal house avows her contempt for birth, station, all that keeps chaos aloof! It is democracy, radicalism —the offshoot of the hydra-headed monster which runs rampant in these days."

The Earl groaned, the family groaned; but no echo of their lamentations disturbed the Lady Arabella in her pleasant retreat far up the Champs Elysées. At last, the august conclave had to cease its moans from lack of breath, and allow this wayward scion of the race to follow her caprices in peace. They did not seem very dangerous caprices at present. Mrs. Mocourt consoled the Earl by a secret letter, giving an account of their quiet life. She was only obliged to chronicle one painful eccentricity on the part of her former pupil. Lady Arabella had seen fit to make a pet of a young bear, which she kept chained in the court-yard, reports of its escape frightening the whole neighbourhood into fits at least six times each day. The neighbourhood complained, the police interfered; Arabella laughed in their faces, and stood by her bear. The

Earl was glad to compound for so innocent an eccentricity, and Paris regarded it as another specimen of British insanity.

But in less than a week the soothing effects of Mrs. Mocourt's missive were done away by an act on the young lady's part which caused telegraphs and newspapers to be busy with her name, and made her stared at when she appeared in public.

The Marquis de Cherville had for some time past devoted himself to training a filly for his sister, pretty Madame de B.——, the most timid of equestrians, and graceful of women. The Marquis was really a charming specimen of the gilded youth of the noblest faubourg, but he had never succeeded in ridding himself of one prejudice—he detested the daughters of Albion. And of those daughters he held the Lady Arabella in special abhorrence.

The autumn previous the Marquis had stayed at a friend's house in the Highlands. During the first days of his sojourn the Lady Arabella Grahame was there also. Her great wolf-dog nearly ate him up as he descended at the door, and the unreasonable damsel hated him in consequence. They would never be introduced to each other; both declined it; and while she remained she excelled herself in outré opinions and performances, in order to horrify her enemy. She nearly shot him by accident one morning when she was handling a pistol. That put the climax on all.

Naturally, he neither forgot nor forgave. The young lady's name had the same effect on the Marquis that a red rag has on a mad bull. He charged full tilt at Albion and its maids with bitter anathemas. In return, Lady Arabella made his title synonymous with everything silly or effeminate; whatever she wished to stigmatize as utterly unendurable she denominated a "de Cherville." As they had scores of mutual friends both in England and France, of course each heard all the harsh criticisms pronounced by the other, and was spurred on to increased enmity.

On an ill-fated Tuesday the Marquis was exercising the filly in one of the broad alleys of the Bois. He was in an especially amiable mood and in the most stylish possible costume—altogether quite a modern Apollo. Rush—whiz—flash, out of a narrow path that made so short a turn that nobody but a maniac or an Englishwoman would have ridden fast around it, darted Lady Arabella Grahame on the back of her fiend of an Irish mare. She saw nothing, and she could not have checked the mare if she had seen. Like a cannon-ball, the Hibernian fury dashed against the filly, knocked her down, and added a vicious kick. When the Marquis could realize anything, he found himself lying on the ground, with his shoulder-blade broken, and the poor filly dying.

Only Spitfire's strength and her mistress's quickness prevented their also having an ugly tumble. On they dashed, like a female imperson-

ation of the Centaur; but, as soon as she could, Lady Arabella reined in the mare, and turned her, prancing and rearing, with all her impish tricks fully roused, back to the spot where the accident occurred.

The unfortunate marquis was trying to raise himself from the earth. His eyes met the lady's: each recognized an implacable foe. She looked past the wounded man, gazed, for an instant, upon the quivering frame of the expiring filly, then regarded her own steed. Not a scratch had befallen the mare. Without a word, or another glance at the prostrate Frenchman, she put Spitfire at her speed, and vanished down the alley. Presently her groom appeared in view, but he was too much occupied getting within sight of his mistress to notice any other mundane object.

Of course, before night, the story was all over Paris. If the Marquis had been inclined to keep the affair quiet, he could not have done so. But he had no such desire. Gallant son of Gaul though he was, the blonde beauty's cold-blooded disregard of the consequences of her recklessness upset his self-control. The victim was at once buried, and over her grave was placed a wooden monument, with this inscription:—

"FAUVETTE, aged four years and eight months. Murdered, May 10th, 18—, by Lady Arabella Grahame, Englishwoman."

The grave was at Montmorenci, and the curiosity-devoured Parisians rushed in shoals to read the epitaph, abuse the British nation, and scatter garlands over the tomb of Fauvette.

The Marquis submitted with tolerable patience to the decrees of the doctors, lay in bed, nursed his shoulder, and meditated some sweet revenge. Everybody was interested in his state, except the Lady Arabella. She played with her bear, rode Spitfire, and made no sign. Wherever she appeared people stared at her as if she were a Frankenstein monster; but she seemed all unconscious; and even Mrs. Mocourt dared not hint a word of reproof, or name the subject in her presence. To add to the scandal, the history of her first meeting with the Marquis in the Highlands was narrated and enlarged, until the mildest form it took was, that she had set her wolf-dog on him, challenged him to a duel, and when he refused, fired a pistol at him. The encounter in the Bois de Boulogne was decided to be a deliberate attempt at assassination.

De Cherville recovered from his hurt, but his wounded spirit was by no means healed. He flung gallantry to the winds. Supported by the unanimous verdict of his friends, he resolved to treat the creature philosophically under the circumstances. Sending his lawyer to the lady's residence, he demanded payment for the filly. Lady Arabella chanced to be in the court-yard, feeding her bear, when the lawyer arrived and explained his business.

"Show him here," said the irate daughter of the Grahames, when

the footman repeated the message and the matter as nearly as he dared.

Into the court-yard marched the avoué, very stately and grand. But his composure gave way at the sight of the lady standing under a linden-tree with the half-grown cub. He was erect on his hind legs, his forepaws resting on her shoulder, and bound only by a chain, which looked very frail and insecure to the startled servant of justice.

"What are you skipping into the air for?" demanded Lady Arabella, at a sudden but not unnatural movement on the lawyer's part. "Did you come from Charenton?"

"I come, madame, from the Marquis de Cherville," stammered he.

"Very little difference," quoth her ladyship. "You came from a mad man, instead of a mad-house! What do you want?"

The lawyer explained, his eloquence sorely disturbed by sundry growls from Bruin. Lady Arabella heard him through, burst out laughing, and then went into a tremendous rage.

"Walk through that gate in half a second, Monsieur l'Avoué, or I will set the bear on you!"

She made a motion to undo the animal's chain. Bruin was growling again, and showing his sharp young teeth in a frightful grin. The lawyer gathered up his dignity, with the skirts of his long coat and fled, pursued by a burst of laughter from Lady Arabella in which the bear joined with alarming energy. The crest-fallen gentleman returned to the Marquis to report his ill-success, of course embellishing his account. By the time it was thrice repeated, the story ran that Bruin had been set on him, and that he had narrowly escaped with his life.

The Marquis was not inclined to forego vengeance, nor was he at the end of his resources. He renounced the idea of a civil suit, and carried the matter into a more powerful court, so far as the world of fashion and the turf were concerned. Everybody knows that the Jockey Club in Paris is a tribunal from whose decisions no gentleman would dream of appealing, and it has frequently been called on as umpire in equine difficulties.

The case was brought before the club, and a unanimous verdict rendered against the Lady Arabella. She was reprimanded severely for her recklessness, and adjudged to pay the price of the filly. The decision was transmitted to the young lady, written on illuminated parchment, made awful by historical names and tremendous seals.

The Lady Arabella rent the sheet carefully into sixteen pieces, crowded the ends into a small, white glove, and sent the whole back to the club in a dainty, silk-lined work-basket.

She had committed the crowning insult—the unpardonable sin. Had she boxed the ears of the grandest duchess in the Faubourg St. Germain, society could not have been more outraged. The newspapers teemed with the quarrel, and Gavarni published caricatures of

the British "peeress." The market-women chose her name as a new expression of abuse for their wide vocabulary. The gamins chanted original songs of condemnation under her windows: indeed, hardly anything short of a republican outbreak could have roused such a disturbance. English, and titled though she was, the English verdict was against her. Punch, with his customary disloyalty where the sacredness of the nobility is concerned, improved on Gavarni's caricatures, introducing the Earl, and several other prominent members of the illustrious family. The noble relations nearly went mad, and debated the propriety of immuring Lady Arabella in a private lunatic asylum; a design only relinquished from a fear of the retribution the abandoned young woman would surely work, sooner or later.

The sole person utterly unmoved was the Lady Arabella herself. Mrs. Mocourt wept herself half blind; the maids lived in hysterics; at every sound in the street the men-servants rushed to barricade the entrance, under the impression that the enraged populace, headed by the Marquis and the Jockey Club, were coming to tear the household limb from limb. But her ladyship preserved her composure unbroken, and even began an elaborate piece of embroidery as an occupation for her mornings. It was odd enough to see her sitting tranquilly at work, looking so beautiful and refined in her white draperies, while the people shouted her name in the streets, and her subordinates trembled in corners. She was deaf to the entreaties of those faithful adherents that she would leave Paris. Never, she said, until the storm subsided; it should not be said she ran away. A short while and some new excitement diverted public attention. Lady Arabella was left in quiet, save so far as letters or daily demands from the Marquis were concerned. Then a private affliction befell her; the cherished bear died so suddenly that his demise was attributed to poison, but the culprit could not be discovered.

So Lady Arabella rushed back to England in such haste that her servants had scarcely time to pack the boxes. She absolutely paid the Earl a visit, and conducted herself with so complete an unconsciousness of having given offence, that the family sat aghast at her assurance, but dared not so much as whistle.

The Earl, softened by her charms, and the witty stories wherewith she lightened the patrician dulness of the castle, determined to set matters straight in spite of her; he could not help loving the wayward creature. He knew that the Marquis still besieged her with letters; newspapers averse to the family kept the affair fresh in people's minds, and he found somewhere a brilliant idea upon which he decided to act. He would write to de Cherville in his niece's name, pay the price of the murdered filly, and end the scandal.

But no member of the Grahame race could ever do anything without first bringing the matter before the family conclave. The consequence

was, that Lady Arabella discovered what was going on, and descended, like an enraged Juno, on the august *junta*, when it was assembled for the purpose of concocting a suitable epistle.

"You are writing a letter to the Marquis de Cherville," said she, and the instant the assembly heard her voice it trembled. The tone was ominously calm. When Lady Arabella paused, the family knew she might be coaxed; but when she spoke with that slow coldness, the family had learned it would be safer to trifle with a lion, or any other wild animal of which she might chance to make a passing favourite. The Earl shook in his shoes.

"My dear, I thought—we all thought—— "

"I beg none of you will weary yourselves by so unusual an effort," interrupted Lady Arabella, sweetly, as her noble relative broke down.

"This," said the Earl, making a dash at his dignity, "is—is a matter in which the family honour is concerned. You—you really must permit us to—to act, my love."

"The family honour!" quoth she. "When was honour grafted on the ancestral tree? Much Jack yonder knows about it."

Jack was a titled cousin, with many aristocratic follies written down against his name.

"I wonder if Mary would like to talk of it?" pursued her ladyship. Mary was a marchioness, who had not lived with her legal master for some years, and of whom ill-natured people said that if her private diary could be printed, it would be the oddest chronicle since the days of Louis XIV.

Both Jack and Mary were present. She, the marchioness, burst into a flood of hysterical tears; the other women gathered sympathetically about her, and there would have been a very trying scene if that blundering Jack had not thrown dirty water over her from a bouquet-glass in his bewilderment. The ladies flew at him for his awkwardness; the marchioness called him several names which had no place among his ancestral titles. Lady Arabella interrupted the tempest.

"One moment," said she. "You can follow up your private quarrels at any time, good people! Just now I am the person under consideration, and I want my affairs settled before I leave the room. What have you to say further, Lord Faulconbridge?" she asked, turning to her uncle.

"If you would only be reasonable!" groaned the earl.

"And I a Grahame!" returned she. "My dear uncle, don't expect impossibilities."

Her jest encouraged the family to think she was giving way. A faint chorus of expostulation was resumed, which she checked unceremoniously.

"Ah, you want war!" said she. "Well, you shall have it."

"My dear niece!" began the Earl, and was fain to stop. She had gone into one of her passions, and was past listening.

"Take one step toward meddling with me, or anything that concerns me, now or in the future, and I will make you long to emigrate in a body to some South Sea island, where the Grahame name never was heard of," cried she, in her clearest, most deliberate voice, which sounded as hard as iron.

New expostulations from the Earl, outcries from the women, threats from the men. The Grahame blood was well up on all sides. But Lady Arabella conquered. She stung each one of them neatly in turn, she covered the group with confusion, and paralyzed it with wrath.

"Do this if you dare—mind, if you dare! I am Helena Faulconbridge's granddaughter! Some of you remember her, and were in the castle the night she set it on fire to punish this wonderful family for its insolence. I have as much courage as she had, and more brains. I'll do worse than burn you in your beds, my cousins!"

The women wept, the men said short words under their breath; but standing there in their midst, cold and white, the girl looked so much like the portraits of the dreaded ancestress, whose name had scarcely been mentioned aloud for ten years, that they were struck dumb. She saw her advantage.

"If you presume to interfere," she went on, and her words cut like hail-stones, "if one among you, from Lord Faulconbridge down to the poorest, neediest, laziest of the name—who prefers to be a cringing dependent to earning his living like an honest man—has the intolerable impertinence to meddle in this matter, I will write letters to the newspapers in London and Paris denying this grand family's authority to act. And if you use my name again, I will bring an action against you all in a court of justice."

And, with that, out of the room swept the Lady Arabella.

For three days she made their waking hours torture by the pitiless lash of her tongue, all the time appearing in her sweetest, gayest mood, and agonized their rest at night. One had the nightmare, another had the nightmare; which disturbed the house with hideous cries. Everybody rushed frantically through the galleries in costumes more picturesque than decent, mad with fears that the girl possessed by the spirit of old Helena had set fire to the illustrious mansion.

Lady Arabella summoned her faithful Mocourt, her private maid and men, and with scant leave-taking to the Earl, and none whatever for the rest of the clan, she departed. Secret intelligence had reached her that the Marquis de Cherville was coming to England; and though not in the least disposed to yield the conflict, she wanted a short armistice.

So she and her train floated over to Switzerland, and for a time she was left in peace. But Mocourt's passion for letter-writing, and her

loyal desire to relieve the Earl's uneasiness, again exposed Lady Arabella to the enemy's attacks.

During the long midsummer days, while she was reposing amid the beauties of Interlachen, renewed epistles from the Marquis beset her; a daily shower, thicker than the locusts in Egypt. At last, John brought some news to James, and James to the maid, and she to Mrs. Mocourt. The wretched old lady flew in despair to her pupil. The French Marquis had arrived, and set up his tent in Interlachen! She was so long in getting out her tidings that Lady Arabella lost patience.

"You stupid old dear," said she, "unless you speak, I'll not let you open your mouth for a week. What is the Earl at now?"

"It's not the Earl," moaned Mrs. Mocourt. "It's the French Marquis—right opposite our hotel. He came this evening!"

There never was any counting on the way in which Lady Arabella would receive unpleasant tidings. She saw fit to be immensely amused by this proceeding on the Frenchman's part. But, being rather tired of Interlachen and its loveliness, she determined to give him the slip.

At break of dawn she and her retainers departed; and she did not allow them to rest till they reached Baden. But in less than a week the crowds that thronged the cursaal had a fresh topic of conversation. The Marquis de Cherville appeared; the old stories were revived, and Lady Arabella was stared at again.

"Since he likes travelling he shall have enough of it," she said. "He shall turn himself into a new edition of the Wandering Jew if he follows me."

Mocourt wept, maid and men groaned, but off they had to start again. Along the Rhine went Lady Arabella and her flock, and the Marquis pursued. The adventure grew interesting. The young lady found excitement in eluding his pursuits, and forced her people to submit to out-of-the-way routes and unheard-of disguises. But the Marquis proved as keen of scent as a sleuth-hound. No matter what cunning she displayed, or how retired the spot in which she hid, there never were many days of quiet. He found her out, followed, and overtook her. Then she again took up her march. Tired of obscure routes and small villages, she sought Berlin. In three days the newspapers announced the Frenchman's arrival, detailed the romance, published her portrait, and made her once more the mark of all eyes and tongues.

She fled to Dresden; autumn had come then. The Marquis haunted her among the countless marvellous teapots, and again rendered life a burden. She debated with herself whether she should try Russia, and enjoy the pleasure of meeting her enemy with his nose frozen. But recollecting that her own might freeze as well as his, she turned in another direction.

Munich was next reached. Six hours after the Lady Arabella was

in her hotel there, the Marquis arrived. Away to Prague went she but the Marquis was on her track. She went several days' journey down the Danube, disguised as a peasant, with poor old Mocourt transformed into a spectacled market-woman, the maid's existence tortured by an unbecoming dress, and John and James attired as huntsmen. To support the character properly, the men drank more beer than was wise, and told the whole story to some English-speaking Germans on board.

A boat passed as Lady Arabella sat on deck, looking in her humble attire like one of the disguised princesses of fairy tales. She beheld the Marquis tranquilly smoking his cigar. He lifted his travelling-cap courteously at sight of her; but she was too weary to enjoy the absurd side of the encounter. Instead of going on to the town where she had intended to stay, she halted at a wretched little village, in which there was no place to sleep, nothing to eat, and no post-horses to carry her forward. The next morning she was informed that steeds were provided and waited in readiness. Away she dashed; and at the end of the day learned she had been travelling at the Marquis's expense! He had sent the horses and paid the bills. Lady Arabella actually cried with vexation.

She got to Milan, but de Cherville was there before her. The story of the flight and pursuit had spread, and every tongue wagged in eager recitation. As she passed through the station, worn out, dusty, miserable, with her more miserable train, half the idle people in the town were collected to stare at her.

Give in she would not. The Marquis should be killed with fatigue and worry, though she made a cripple or an idiot of herself in the work.

By rail to Bologna, Ancona, Rome. The Marquis enriched the telegraph by the occupation he afforded it, and saved his laziness a tiresome journey. He went to Genoa, dropped down to Civita Vecchia by steamer, and met her in the Eternal City, looking as amiable and elegant as if he had just strolled out of his club on the Boulevard des Italiens.

The stories followed and grew, but Lady Arabella did not know that the imaginative Romans were adding fresh romance to the chronicle. It was said, and believed, that there had been love passages between the two; that she had shot him in the Highlands from jealousy. Her train heard all this, but even old Mocourt did not venture to tell her ladyship. She received frequent letters from her pursuer; encountered him wherever she turned; on the Pincio; in picture-galleries; everywhere. If she took a box at the opera, he was visible in one opposite. Worse than all, he adopted the plan of doing every sort of courteous thing by her; and she began to understand that, for the first time in her life, she had met more than her match. It annoyed

her beyond measure to discover that he was wonderfully handsome. Not a day passed without her hearing of words and deeds which proved him possessed of a good head and heart. Altogether she had to fight hard with herself in order to hate him as bitterly as was desirable.

She went to Naples—sailed to Sicily. He confronted her on the Via Toledo, and bowed to her in the shadow of Etna, having made her inland journey easy for her, and nearly driven her out of her senses by his kindness. The very flowers she admired in her room were placed there by his orders. All she could do was to fling them out of the window, and then be ashamed of displaying such weakness before so profound a generalship.

It was more than a year from the luckless Tuesday on which Lady Arabella and the Irish mare slew Fauvette and maimed the Marquis, that the damsel found herself in Florence. Now, Florence is one of the most bewitching places on this side Paradise. Everybody does what he pleases there, and everybody else talks about it, not in a censorious way, but with frank approval. The world there imputes the most atrocious motives to all actions, thinking it no harm to commit the sins so openly canvassed.

The Marquis arrived. He took rooms in face of Lady Arabella's apartments; sent her bouquets; followed her carriage on horseback; quarrelled with a man for nearly being run over by her coachman; and watched her in her loge at the Pergola. Florence caught up the romantic side of the story, believed it, and discussed it—with additions.

There had been a secret marriage; an unscrupulous rival had made trouble at the very altar, by some proof-attested tale of the Marquis's treachery. Lady Arabella fled in wrath, after a terrible scene, which the story-tellers elaborated with great talent. She had renounced him for ever, rent her wedding-veil, flung the nuptial ring at his feet, and rushed from the sacred edifice, calling down the vengeance of heaven upon her newly-plighted lord. The Marquis wanted an opportunity to clear himself from the ingeniously concocted plot, and whithersoever she journeyed he pursued, besetting her with entreaties and prayers: to which she would not listen.

But this narrative, interesting as it was, speedily palled on the jaded appetites of Florentine gossips. They required something more: and so they reversed the incidents in the melodrama. It was Lady Arabella who had been denounced in the church! Some fiend of a woman, whom the Marquis had slighted, hired a villain to trouble their peace; and he succeeded so well that the Marquis burst away with frightful curses. Since that evil hour he had scoured Europe to escape his bride; but she followed him everywhere, hoping against hope, trusting that time and perseverance might clear up the mystery, or soften the Marquis into a belief in her protestations.

This version of the chronicle reached poor old Mocourt at length, and her last glimmer of sense and reason gave way. She was worn to a shadow by these endless pilgrimages over land and sea; her nerves had grown frailer than thread paper; and her religion a dumb fatalism, which let in no ray of light. But this was the crowning blow.

She lay down on her bed, determined to die. Lady Arabella was disturbed by her gasps and sobs, and ran in to ask what had happened. At sight of her, Mocourt went off into spasms. Evidently, the first thing to be done was to restore the poor creature to composure. After Arabella had spilled a great bottle of aromatic vinegar over the sheets, scorched the pillow-case with ammonia, and dosed her with red ink, which she mistook for lavender, Mocourt was able to sit up, wring her hands, and weep like a fountain. Which did her good.

"What on earth is the matter?" cried Lady Arabella. "Is it your chest, or your heart?"

"Oh, don't laugh!" shivered the old lady. "I'd as soon see you laugh at your own funeral."

"I only wanted to cheer you up a little, my poor old dear," said her pupil. "You are completely worn out. The least thing upsets your nerves."

"It's not my nerves!" moaned the patient. "Oh, what will the Earl say? I shall be blamed. The whole family will believe it to be my fault. They'll all pounce on me: I know they will!"

"Let me see them try it!" flashed Lady Arabella in her chivalry. "But what is it they will think your fault?"

"The whole story! Oh, nothing so dreadful ever happened to anybody in the world. My poor dear girl—my own love!"

"But you must tell it me."

In a series of jerky squeaks, interspersed with much red-lavende drinking, the old lady related the slanders in their full atrocity. Her listener quailed for the first time. It occurred to her that she was paying rather dearly for gratifying her obstinacy, her love of wayward freaks. But she had self-control enough left to hide the full extent of her dismay from poor Mocourt.

"It does not matter what the Florentines say," she averred. "They are noted for never telling the truth. And the English and French, sojourning here, are worse than the natives."

"Slander is always believed everywhere," groaned Mocourt. "It always will be, on this side heaven."

There was so much truth in the assertion, that Lady Arabella, staggered for an instant, could not speak.

"Slander flies about of itself," sobbed Mocourt, in her anguish. "The winds carry it; the birds of the air repeat it; just remember your Virgil! Remember how it always is," she continued, trembling between the effects of her own eloquence and her dread of rousing

her friend's anger. "Look at history; read the newspapers; no, don't; they're not fit—— Oh, oh, my dear, if you would only have listened to me!"

"What can I do?" asked Lady Arabella, almost humbly.

"For Heaven's sake, pay the man, and go straight back to England," urged Mrs. Mocourt. "It *must* be the price of his horse that he wants."

"Go back to be badgered by the whole tribe? That I never will."

"The Frenchman ought to be killed," sobbed Mocourt. "These stories all come from him, I am sure. Hideous man!"

"Don't slander his personal appearance," interjected Lady Arabella. "He is very handsome!"

"I never look at him. I turn my head always, and we meet him so often that I feel like a te-totum."

"I have a dozen of his photographs," replied Lady Arabella. "He sent me so many I got tired of tearing them up. But, come, you must go to sleep now."

"I shall never sleep again," replied the governess, in a tone as despairing as Macbeth's. "If we stayed here a twelvemonth, I should not doze during the whole time!"

But Lady Arabella secretly vowed that she should slumber tranquilly within two hours. She administered a dose of morphine in the lavender, and at last Mocourt buried her tear-stained face in the pillows, and slept in spite of herself.

Lady Arabella bent over her, and kissed the wrinkled forehead. She was filled with remorse when she saw how sorely her kind old friend had aged during the past weary year. Stealing softly out of the room to visit the maid, who was ill in bed with a feverish cold, she found only new troubles, and fled in haste. James met her, respectful, but full of grievances; and John's voice rose from below stairs, crooning a dismal chant.

The old palace seemed turned into a dungeon, in which she could not breathe another instant. She ordered James to bid a groom take her saddle-horse outside the San Gallo Gate. Arraying herself in her habit, she put on a thick veil, drove outside the town in her carriage; and there mounted her horse. She would not let the groom follow. The carriage could go up to Fiesole, and wait for her there: he could wait with it.

So she rode up the winding road; and by the time she reached the quaint old town, it was almost sunset. Beyond, stretched a road where she could have a good gallop. But first she reined in her horse, and sat looking down upon the beautiful scene spread out beneath her, though it was half-hidden from her eyes by an unaccustomed rush of tears.

She was looking back in thought over her life, so lonely and unsatisfactory, in spite of its splendour. Bitterly did she now regret the unfeminine spirit which had animated her in this contest with the Marquis de Cherville. She tried to shift the blame from her own shoulders, but it was impossible. It had been idiotic folly from the first: and it was now worse. Scandal had attacked her name, and would never leave her alone till she was dead. She had always relied on the purity of her motives and conduct to keep the coarsest tongue from assailing her name; but she realized at length that no human being who transgresses the set laws of society can escape. Her exalted rank would only make the tale more widely spread. Every man's hand—or worse, every woman's hand—would be against her.

She cried a little: and then she took refuge in thoughts of the Marquis. She could not help fancying how pleasant such care and attention as he had shown during the past months would be, if fate had not put it out of their power to be friends. The price of the filly, indeed! —that had been poor silly Mocourt's thought: *she* knew he only wanted to be friends with her. And then she grew angry with herself for such silly imaginings, wiped away her tears, and set off at a mad canter.

She thought she heard a horse's hoofs behind her, and rode the faster. Her fiery grey took fright at some object in the road, shied suddenly, stumbled, fell; and, for the first time in her life, Lady Arabella was thrown from the saddle.

When she came to her senses, she was neither dead nor harmed. She had been moved to the road-side, where was a stone bench under an image of the Virgin—a fountain at a little distance. Somebody was standing beside her, who turned at a sound she uttered. She was face to face with the Marquis!

"Don't try to move," said M. de Cherville. "Let me give you some more water."

She had no intention of stirring; simply because she could not stir. She leaned back helpless, faint. He looked so handsome in the soft twilight, standing bareheaded before her!—his dreamy eyes full of interest, his voice so gentle.

"I—I should like to get back: I can ride now, I think," was the first remark she hazarded.

But she was informed that her horse had galloped back to Fiesole, and his had followed it. A ragged boy passed, and the Marquis ordered him to send on a carriage he would find waiting in the village square.

"I—I can't thank you," she murmured.

"There is no need!" he replied. "I am very grateful that I was able to help you."

Was it possible that he did not recognize her in the dim light? If he remembered her, could he stand there and talk like that? She must make her identity known. His scorn and anger would be a little

punishment for all her silly conduct—she would have applied a harsher name now.

"Perhaps, if you knew who I am, you would not have helped me," she began, in a timid tone. "I am Lady Arabella Grahame."

"Of course; I know it!" he exclaimed. "Of all human beings who could have aided you, I am most thankful that it was I."

The conquered girl sank back in her seat, and burst into a fit of weeping, as tumultuous as if she had been sixteen.

"I—I can't bear it," she gasped. And she was so near a fit of hysterics that she could neither speak nor hear; could do nothing but sob, and choke.

When the faculty of hearing returned she concluded that she had gone stark, staring mad. Her senses refused to give credence to the words the Marquis poured out. He seemed to be in the middle of a speech, and evidently supposed she had heard what went before.

"You will drive me from you, I know," he said, in perfect English, "but at least it is a comfort to say it—I love you!—I love you! I cannot tell you, Lady Arabella, when my love began. I think, now, in the early days of my unmanly pursuit. But since then I have followed because to breathe the same air with you, catch sight of your face, was heaven itself—the only happiness I could ever hope for."

Arabella Grahame checked her sobs, held her reeling senses fast, sat upright, and stared at him.

"You—you are punishing me too severely," she said. "Be generous; content yourself with having saved my life. Don't laugh at me."

"Can you think it?" he cried. "I love you, I say—I love you! I know I am wrong to persecute you now; but try to think kindly of me, Lady Arabella; try to tolerate me."

Like a handsome hero in the by-gone days of chivalry, he sank on his knees and told his story. And she? She listened, entranced, while the nightingale sang a soft refrain to his words, and the Italian moon rose suddenly from behind the hills, and floated in glory up the sky.

"Speak to me!" he pleaded. "Tell me that I do not seem to you like a complete stranger! Let me hope, at least, to be ranked among your friends—I will ask no more as yet. I will be patient as man never was; live on a look—a smile——"

The Marquis stopped abruptly. Some incoherent exclamation she uttered made him lift his eyes to hers. He read the consciousness which had suddenly dawned upon her own soul. During these months in which he had played so important a part in her life she had learned to love him! In an instant the truth became so familiar that she could hardly believe she had never known it before. And the explanation came.

It was some time before they remembered the proprieties of life. By

then they had talked themselves far past the possibility of misunderstanding. A short while and they would become man and wife.

The carriage drove up, and halted near. De Chervil'e led her towards it, talking.

"You will even consent to go to England, and gratify the Earl by having the marriage at home?"

"I will do whatever you tell me," she answered, trying to laugh, and beginning to cry. "It is of no use for me to rebel! I have been tamed, you see, and I am glad to relinquish the charge of myself."

The family beamed with delight when the news reached them, the Earl reading the welcome letter aloud. "It's like a romance," said his lordship.

Paris went wild with astonishment: but consoled itself by deciding that the Marquis had given in to English manners and habits, until he was as mad as the maddest Briton of them all.

LIFE'S SONG AND SUNSHINE.

By Mrs. G. Linnæus Banks.

Why blame me that my songs are sad?
If ye would have them gay,
Restore me that which made me glad,
Life's sunshine and its May.
True, cloudlets flecked the rays divine,
Thorns hid beneath the bloom,
But then, intoxicant as wine
Were radiance and perfume.
And through the clust'ring pink and white
What recked I of the thorn,
While tint and fragrance brought delight,
And hope was newly born?
But, crimson tipped, or creamy white,
Each petal was a wing;
And, ah! the flowers alone took flight,
The thorns remained to sting.

If ye would have a joyous strain,
Bring back my youthful lyre,
Still every pulse that throbs with pain,
Renew life's fading fire.
Bring round me once the loving hands
That clasped in mine of old,
Open mine ears to seraph bands,
Touching their harps of gold:
And give warm love my love to bless,
Kind thoughts for kindly deeds;
Bring tenderness and gentleness
To staunch the heart that bleeds:
Obliterate the memories
Of cruel wrong and scorn,
If ye would have such melodies
As joy sings in its morn.

ACROSS THE PLAINS.

A True Narrative.

WE had been out three days and three nights, each day, each night, dragging its long, slow, heavy hours over us, with the same grey, hopeless blank of sky overhead, and the same wearisome reach of sandy plain underneath. A dreary, fixed, eternal monotony of landscape, that had some awful power in it—something worse than any fierce wrath and raging of storm, as its spirit entered into and took possession of the soul. There was a damp, still cold in the air that pierced your very marrow, chilling and numbing all the life that it touched, just as the scene outside chilled one's thought and feeling.

And yet I knew that beyond the horizon, which shut us down with its grey gloom, with its awful chill and torpor, there was strong, bounding, joyous life, and warmth, and love. It seemed ages since we had entered that death in life: but in another day, as the driver said, we should "strike civilization."

How every sense ached and hungered for a sight of the little, long, low habitation where we were to take our first real meal after leaving the mining regions!—and yet, how my eyes sickened at the sight of the gloomy adobe-houses, where we paused occasionally to take a hasty lunch and change the tired mules in the old stage! Then, the meal over, back again into the coach—or waggon; as you may please to call it—and we went plunging on, on, towards the dear old East—towards the warmth, and light, and bustle—towards the great cities, with all their throb and burden of life—towards the pleasant old towns that dream along the railroads—towards the familiar faces, and voices, and ways—and oh, heart of mine, towards home!

It was in the opening of December, but the roads were unusually good for the season; although that dead grey sky, with some dreary pathos in it that reminded me of human faces I had seen, out of which all the spring and hope of life had vanished—that dead grey sky had grown a little darker and heavier each day. Still we hoped that the snow would not fall before we got beyond those wide, treeless plains of Western Kansas, and beheld signs of human life and cultivation, for which one pair of eyes at least were famishing—famishing.

My companions, three in all, were from Denver city; they had been, like myself, delving among the mines there, and the marks of toil, hardship, exposure of every sort, lay on each of us. I was, by half a score of years, the youngest of the party. My travelling companions were men with heavy, stolid, lymphatic forms and faces, but not without occasional gleams of kindly humour and generous nature breaking through all their grumbling, and dozing, and general sense of weariness

and discomfort. But though we were shut up together in that old stage and from all the world; isolated on those vast, dreary plains of Western Kansas, there was a vast distance between these men and me. Each one had made his "pile," and was going home to the States to share it with wife or child, or relative; but none of them felt the hot, fierce impatience—the wild, sick, unutterable longing—which held possession of me through those days and nights. For two years I had kept it in check with strong will and iron purpose, but now the fire burned and the thirst consumed me. And still the mules dragged, and toiled, and panted over the desert plains; but their faces were set—oh, how I blessed God in my heart—their faces were set to the eastward.

Mother and little Flossie! What were they doing that night, I wondered, in that little bit of a brown nest of a cottage in that old farming district on the Massachusetts Bay, not many miles from Boston? That low, century-old homestead with its gambrel roof was the best we could afford after father died; and we were thankful enough to be able to keep up that.

At the time my father died I was a schoolboy. And there was nothing for it but to send for me home that I might take up the helm on the farm which my father's hand had dropped.

They were struggling years that followed; struggling for food and raiment and shelter. Expenses swallowed up everything: I was inexperienced in regard to the land.

Mother was broken down; and Flossie, my one little sister, with the lights and shadows in the fine gold hair that gave her her household name—Flossie, with her sparkling eyes and her little peach-blossom of a face; the soft, bright dimpled little thing, could do nothing but cling to us in her youth and helplessness.

How we weathered it through the years that followed I hardly know, with no arm but my boyish one to keep the wolf from the door. I worked at whatever my hand found to do with my might: but each year it grew harder and harder to keep our heads above water.

About that time we began to hear rumours of the vast fortunes that lay sealed up among the mountains of Colorado. And one day—I remember it as though it were but yesterday—when I had worked harder than any man ever worked yet, there flashed into my mind the thought of Colorado. If I could only go off there and make a fortune as others were doing! Not a vast fortune: I did not care for that: I indulged no visions of wealth and luxury—but just a little sum that would take away the daily terror that was wearing into all our lives, and place mother and Flossie in comfort—ah, if I could do that!

The notion fixed itself in my brain. It gave me no peace night or day. At last, I broke it to them; and so, by degrees they began to see the prospect with my own eyes. And—no matter about the time and way—I started at length for Denver City, and went to work in the mines.

Ah, mother, with your grey hairs, ah, Flossie, with your sparkling face! It was the thought of you that held me up through all the toil, and the hardship, and the disappointment, through the bitter cold and the burning heats, that made up my life there.

But the work was very, very profitable, and I toiled unceasingly: and so, in what seemed a wonderfully short time, my reward came. I amassed the moderate competence I had fixed upon; and was now bearing it back with me on my road home again. With this realized sum and the profits of the bit of land, we should now be at peace.

I remember in that long ride over the plains how often I took out the small leathern bag I carried, and caressed it, and peeped inside at the little yellow glittering heap there.

Five thousand dollars! Everyone of my companions had stayed to double and treble that sum; but it was enough for me. I knew that in that little leather bag lay a pleasant home, lay warmth, and food, and pretty new clothes for Flossie; and peace, and comfort, and blessed rest for mother. The tears grew hot in my eyes to think of it! I shook the little wallet to hear the pleasant jingle of the gold, sweeter to my ears than the song of New England robins. "Oh, dear!" I murmured "it seems strange that a little heap like that can do so much good, can bring so much happiness!" And then there came back to me the words that I used to repeat every Sunday evening when I was a little boy, my childish voice slipping along after my mother's sweet solemn one—"Thou shalt have no other gods but Me."

"Was it making a god of the gold," I asked myself, "when I valued it chiefly for what it would do for my mother and Flossie?" Nay, no! surely not.

I pictured them in my thoughts, sitting in the dear old room that grey December night; with the winds crying drearily outside, and the coals all blossomed into live fire in the small grate; and mother on one side of the table, her hair frosted a little thicker with grey, and Flossie on the other, with the dewy bloom in her cheeks and the sparkle in her eyes. Some night not far off I should burst in suddenly on the dear old lady and the young girl sitting there; and my breath came hot at the anticipation, and my heart grew hungry with the excess of hope.

Opening the door of the stage, I looked out. The darkness was gathering. There was the same wan, deathly sky, as though it carried in its depths some great dumb agony—the same grey stretch of dreary plain as far as my eyes could see into the night—no joy of stars, no glory of moon; nothing but still desolation. And then as I looked, something with a damp chill struck into my face; and I knew the snow had come. The snow had come!—and Leavenworth was yet afar off. I drew in my head and shut the door. I remember thinking that the mules were trusty and the driver knew the highway over the desert; and worn out at last, I must have fallen into a deep sleep.

A sudden rush, and plunge, and shock that sent us all off our seats! —a shaking and quivering that threatened dislocation and compound fractures of the whole framework of the old stage! It righted itself before we had time to call out; not, however, until every occupant had been more or less seriously bruised. We gathered ourselves up as best we could, and looked out.

The dawn and the snow struggled together in the air outside; one glaring white pall seemed to be spread over the earth. The driver was screaming to his mules and pulling the reins in a frantic sort of fashion.

"What is the matter?" we shouted, simultaneously.

"Matter enough," he answered. "The mules have got down in this gully, four feet deep in the snow, and we'll never get 'em out. And that's not the worst on't. I have lost the way."

Do you know the horror of hearing those words out on that vast, silent plain, with the snow placid as sunshine, cruel as treacherous waters, hiding away every sign and mark by which we might have regained our lost track? We were out of the vehicle in a moment. The driver dismounted, and we all stared around us and at each other.

The coach seemed hopelessly lodged in the deep gully, which was choked with drifts of snow that had fallen before we left Denver City; the patient mules stood half buried in the drifts, inflexibly obstinate under the cruel rain of blows with which the driver vainly attempted to impel them forward. It was impossible for the animals to advance through the choked-up hollows in which the stage had lodged itself.

We were tired, worn out, hungry men, for we had not tasted food since we left the last ranch, twenty hours before; but the hope of life was sweet, and we bent to work with all the might of our will, and all the strength of our inured frames. How we tugged, and grappled, and strained together to extricate the stage! While before us the patient mules stood still, with their heads drooped forward and their flanks deep buried in the snow.

And the drops gathered on our foreheads, as though we were toiling in harvest fields, or in the mines we had left: still, shoulder to shoulder, we worked and wrestled on, but it was in vain. What could we do without shovel or spade or implement of any sort to clear away those dreadful drifts of snow? And at last we stood still, and looked in each others' faces, and read there the awful fear we dared not speak.

Was death to come to us here? It passed before us all in awful visions: visions of freezing; of starvation; of murder by the Indians, who haunt those wastes for their prey, and who would be likely to swoop down upon us with war whoop and scalping-knife when they should discover our helpless condition. Or would it come to us by some pack of hungry beasts, scenting us from afar off? I looked at the wan sky above; I looked at the white earth beneath, at the far

level line where both met in the distant horizon : and there was none to help and deliver.

Less than two score of miles away it might be that there was a house ; but it would be almost certain death to attempt to search for it in that wilderness of snow. Once lost, we should inevitably perish, and our bones would lie wasting on the plains for the snows to wrap tenderly in winding-sheets—at least if no harsher fate befel. And then I thought of my mother and little Flossie—Flossie, with the bright warmth in her cheeks and the lights and shadows in her golden hair. And I remembered the little leathern bag, and the gold I had heaped together by that hard toil : the gold that I was taking to them, and that meant possibilities of comfort and happiness, of delight and blessing. Was it possible that, after all, they would never see it ?

I took out the leathern bag and gazed at the yellow heap of glitter, for which I had given everything but life, and in my fierce despair a strong impulse seized me to scatter it all out to the snow and winds. Then little Flossie's face, and the dear mother's behind it, seemed to come as in a vision and look down reproachfully upon me : and I put the temptation away.

My companions were all keenly alive to the extreme perils of our position. We had not so much as a crust of bread among us, and hunger began to prey upon our vitals. Of the hours that followed it sickens me even now to write—of our weary searches for the lost track, of the bitter cold, of the increasing hunger, of the anticipated dread and terror of the future.

Do you think that I, brought up as I had been, could forget the God my mother had taught me to know ?—could forget Him at such a time when death stared us in the face ? No, no. What the others did, I learnt not : but how I prayed to Him, how besought Him in the bitter stress of those slow, despairing hours, only He knows !

"If we had but a spade or a shovel !" Was it the thousandth time those words had crossed my lips, or the lips of my companions ? Another morning had dawned ; and we looked over the white glare of the trackless plain as we spoke it : but my lips found no answer either in heaven above or earth beneath.

But—as the last syllable died into the silence which wrapped us about, my eyes fell on the large, strong tin reflectors, which held the great lamps in their iron sockets. On a sudden it flashed across me that these could be inverted and used instead of spades for clearing out the gully, so that the mules could be again put to service, in which case the chances of regaining the road would be all in our favour, while to attempt it on foot, in our present condition, was, as I said, almost certain death.

At any rate, it looked like a possibility, and on the spur of the moment I suggested the idea to my fellow-travellers. Yes ; it did seem

a chance, they thought; the only chance left to us: and I silently wondered whether it might have been Providence that showed it to *me*. In a moment the heavy reflectors were wrenched down; there were four of them; and then put to a use such as only the direst necessity could have indicated. For the next three or four hours we worked as lost, starving, freezing men will work for life. It was hard, slow labour; the snow was deep, and closely packed; and our implements were not of the most convenient sort, and required very careful handling lest they should break. But at last we cleared a space about the coach, and then a path through the gully, wide enough for the mules to draw it out. It was, however, impossible to induce the frightened and obstinate animals to advance a foot, until they had been again unharnessed from the stage and led to and fro several times through the gully.

The fears of the animals at last allayed, they were again harnessed; and we resumed our seats in the stage with feelings that can never be conceived, or only by those who may have undergone similar peril. It had been an awful time; and seemed, looking back, to have taken up quite a long space of our lives.

Four hours again of searching through that wilderness of snow, sometimes on foot, sometimes in the stage, before we struck the track of the road. It was just before sunset. We rode through the whole of the following night, and just as the dawn was touching with livid light the clouds in the east, we caught sight of a low-roofed house in a clearing, with some smoke ascending from the rough chimney. Oh, the wonderful power and joy of that sight! It comes over me now, and thrills my eyes with tears. Within that house were shelter and warmth and food for us; and we—we had escaped the threatened death. How the driver dashed up to the door with the feeble strength of the enfeebled cattle, just as the light spread itself in a great glow over the sky, I can remember now.

Two weeks had passed. The sky was tremulous all over with the golden life of stars, and in the midst of them shone the white glory of the full moon. It lay on the little cottage, the pleasant homestead, with a silvery calm—and how my heart was beating! Suppose either of them had died, and I was coming back to a desolate home?

Entering the gate, I walked softly up the path. A light was in the old familiar room, but the white blind hid what might be within. Gently opening the house door, a ray of light lay on the passage from the other door, which was ajar. And I saw them. I saw them both. Saw them just as I had seen them so often in my dreams at the mines. They sat by the table—mother and Flossie—Flossie with the lights and shadows in her golden hair.

My heart seemed to be bursting. I pushed the door back. "Mother! Flossie! Do you know who I am?"

There was a sudden start, a quick gaze and a gasp, and Flossie's cry,

"Mother! Mother, it is David!"

And then there rose another voice with a hungry sob breaking through it, and the dear mother was on my neck, and all of us were sobbing together.

And I showed them the bag of gold I had brought; which meant comfort and peace for mother in her old age, and pretty gowns for Flossie; and told them not to mind though I had come back a brown, rough-looking, weather-beaten chap: and oh, what thanksgiving went up to God from our hearts that night!

I am an elderly man now. But I keep by me yet one of those old lamp reflectors: as a solemn memento of that awful journey across the plains.

LOOKING BACK.

THE cypress with the myrtle twines;
The sweet grows bitter at the core;
The summer sun no longer shines
In cloudless splendour as of yore;
The shadows mingle with the light; the
day wears onward to the night.

My heart is wedded to regret;
I sing the songs of other years;
My fairest page of life is wet
With sorrowful, despairing tears;
I mourn the dear departed days, the light
and love in all my ways.

Through golden vistas looking back,
One hour let me review the scene;
Let brief, bright sunshine gild the track
Of dark and barren days between;
One hour let me forget my pain, and live
in lost delight again!

The dream of bliss dispels my gloom:
Again we tread the pathway wide
That winds through fields of waving
bloom
And curves along the river-side;
The lark soars singing out of view to
summer skies of sapphire blue!

And in his eyes of love I look,
And wander in my happy dream
Where branches trail above the brook
To glass their blossoms in the stream;
I hear, where minstrel birds rejoice, the
sweeter music of his voice!

Where hedgerows tall on either side
Festoon with flowers the leafy lane;
Where glancing rays of glory glide,
We saunter, arm in arm, again;
Or, stretched beneath some spreading
tree, he reads the rare romance to me.

Such dreams must vanish in an hour;
The voice falls fainter on my ear;
The petals flutter from the flower;
The fleeting visions disappear;
The fire burns down to ashes grey; the
weary night succeeds the day.

Ah! when I walk in starless ways,
When tempests toss my shuddering
bark,
Say, will the friend of former days
Reach hands of comfort through the
dark?
Alas! no light illumes the gloom: no
voice makes answer from the tomb!

He may not whisper to my heart
Those words of love I sadly miss:
More sweet than are the tears that start
In happy eyes that weep for bliss:
Alas! the tears of anguish dim the eyes
that weep in vain for him!

AH

THE ARGOSY.

NOVEMBER 2, 1874.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TOM FINDS HIS TONGUE.

NEARLY a week elapsed after Tom's last interview with the Squire before he was again invited to Pincote, and after what had passed between himself and Mr. Culpepper he would not go there again without a special invitation. It is probable that the Squire would not have sent for him even at the end of a week had he not grown so thoroughly tired of having to cope with Mrs. McDermot single handed that he was ready to call in assistance from any quarter that promised relief. He knew that Tom would assist him if only a hint were given that he was wanted to do so. And Tom did relieve him; so that for the first time for many days the Squire really enjoyed his dinner.

Notwithstanding all this, matters were so arranged between the Squire and Mrs. McDermot that no opportunity was given Tom of being alone with Jane even for five minutes. The first time this happened he thought that it might perhaps have arisen from mere accident. But the next time he went up to Pincote he saw too clearly what was intended to allow him to remain any longer in doubt. That night, after shaking hands with Tom at parting, Jane found in her palm a tiny note, the contents of which were two lines only. "Should you be shopping in Duxley either to-morrow or next day, I shall be at the toll-gate on the Snelsham road from twelve till one o'clock."

Next day, at half-past twelve to the minute, Jane and her pony-carriage found themselves at the Snelsham toll-gate. There was Tom, sure enough, who got into the trap and took the reins. He turned presently into a by-road that led to nowhere in particular, and there earned the gratitude of Diamond by letting him lapse into a quiet walk which enabled him to take sly nibbles at the road-side grass as he jogged contentedly along.

Two or three minutes passed in silence. Then Tom spoke. "Jane," he said, and it was the first time he had ever called her by her Christian name, "Jane, your father has forbidden me to make love to you."

It seemed as if Jane had nothing to say either for or against this statement. She only breathed a little more quickly, and a lovelier colour flushed her cheeks. But just then Diamond swerved towards a tempting tuft of grass. The carriage gave a slight jerk, and Tom fancied—but it might be nothing more than fancy—that, instinctively, Jane drew a little closer to him. And when Diamond had been punished by the slightest possible flick with the whip between his ears, and was again jogging peacefully on, Jane did not get farther away again, being, perhaps, still slightly nervous; and when Tom looked down there was a little gloved hand resting, light as a feather, on his arm. It was impossible to resist the temptation. Dispensing with the whip for a moment he lifted the little hand tenderly to his lips and kissed it. He was not repulsed.

"Yes, dearest," he went on, "I am absolutely forbidden to make love to you. I can only imagine that your aunt has been talking to your father about us. Be that as it may, he has forbidden me to walk out with you, or even to see you alone. The reason why I asked you to meet me to-day was to tell you of these things."

Still Jane kept silence. Only from the little hand, which had somehow found its way back on to his arm, there came the faintest possible pressure, hardly heavy enough to have crushed a butterfly.

"I told him that I loved you," resumed Tom, "and he could not say that it was a crime to do so. But when I told him that I had never made love to you, or asked you to marry me, he seemed inclined to doubt my veracity. However, I set his mind at rest by giving him my word of honour that, even supposing you were willing to have me—a point respecting which I had very strong doubts indeed—I would not take you for my wife without first obtaining his full consent to do so."

Here Diamond, judging from the earnestness of Tom's tone that his thoughts were otherwhere, and deeming the opportunity a favourable one to steal a little breathing time, gradually slackened his slow pace into a still slower one, till at last he came to a dead stand. Admonished by a crack of the whip half a yard above his head that Tom was still wide awake, he put on a tremendous spurt—for him—which, as they were going down hill at the time, was not difficult. But no sooner had they reached a level bit of road again than the spurt toned itself down to the customary slow trot, with, however, an extra whisk of the tail now and then which seemed to imply: "Mark well what a fiery steed I could be if I only chose to exert myself."

"All this but brings me to one point," said Tom: "that I have never yet told you that I loved you, that I have never yet asked you to become my wife. To-day, then—here—this very moment, I tell you that I do love you as truly and sincerely as it is possible for man to

love; and here I ask you to become my wife. Get along, Diamond, do, sir."

"Dearest, you are not blind," he went on. "You must have seen, you must have known, for a long time past, that my heart—my love—were wholly yours; and that I might one day win you for my own has been a hope, a blissful dream, that has haunted me and charmed my life for longer than I can tell. I ought, perhaps, to have spoken of this to you before, but there were certain reasons for my silence which it is not necessary to dilate upon now, but which, if you care to hear them, I will explain to you another time. Here, then, I ask you whether you feel as if you could ever learn to love me, whether you can ever care for me enough to become my wife. Speak to me, darling—whisper the one little word I burn to hear. Lift your eyes to mine, and let me read there that which will make me happy for life."

Except they two, there was no human being visible. They were alone with the trees, and the birds, and the sailing clouds. There was no one to overhear them save that sly old Diamond, and he pretended to be not listening a bit. For the second time he came to a stand-still, and this time his artfulness remained unreproved and unnoticed.

Jane trembled a little, but her eyes were still cast down. Tom tried to see into their depths but could not. "You promised papa that you would not take me from him without his consent," she said, speaking in little more than a whisper. "That consent you will never obtain."

"That consent I shall obtain if you will only give me yours first."

He spoke firmly and unhesitatingly. Jane could hardly believe her ears. She looked up at him in sheer surprise. For the first time their eyes met.

"You don't know papa as well as I do—how obstinate he is, how full of whims and crotchets. No—no; I feel sure that he will never consent."

"And I feel equally sure that he will. I have no fear on that score—none. But I will put the question to you in another way, in the short business-like way that comes most naturally to a man like me. Jane, dearest, if I can persuade your father to give you to me, will you be so given? Will you come to me and be my own—my wife—for ever?"

Still no answer. Only imperceptibly she crept a little closer to his side—a very little. He took that for his answer. First one arm went round her and then the other. He drew her to his heart, he drew her to his lips; he kissed her and called her his own. And she? Well, painful though it be to write it, she never reproved him in the least, but seemed content to sit there with her head resting on his shoulder, and to suffer Love's sweet punishment of kisses in silence.

It is on record that Diamond was the first to move.

While standing there he had fallen into a snooze, and had dreamt

that another pony had been put into his particular stall and was at that moment engaged in munching his particular truss of hay. Overcome by his feelings, he turned deliberately round and started for home at a gentle trot. Thus disturbed, Tom and Jane came back to sublunary matters with a laugh, and a little confusion on Jane's part. Tom drove her back as far as the toll-gate and then shook hands and left her. Jane reached home as one in a blissful dream.

Three days later Tom received a note in the Squire's own crabbed hand-writing, asking him to go up to Pincote as early as possible. He was evidently wanted for something out of the ordinary way. Wondering a little, he went. The Squire received him in high good humour and was not long in letting him know why he had sent for him.

"I have had some fellows here from the railway company," he said. "They want to buy Prior's Croft."

Tom's eyebrows went up a little. "I thought, sir, it would prove to be a profitable speculation by and by. Did they name any price?"

"No, nothing was said as to price. They simply wanted to know whether I was willing to sell it."

"And you told them that you were?"

"I told them that I would take time to think about it. I didn't want to seem too eager, you know."

"That's right, sir. Play with them a little before you finally hook them."

"From what they said, they want to build a station on the Croft."

"Yes, a new passenger station, with plenty of siding accommodation."

"Ah! you know something about it, do you?"

"I know this much, sir, that the proposal of the new company to run a fresh line into Duxley has put the old company on their mettle. In place of the dirty ram-shackle station with which we have all had to be content for so many years, they are going to give us a new station, handsome and commodious; and Prior's Croft is the place named as the most probable site for the new terminus."

"Hang me, if I don't believe you knew something of this all along!" said the Squire. "If not, how could you have raised that heavy mortgage for me?"

There was a twinkle in Tom's eyes but he said nothing. Mr. Culpepper might have been still further surprised had he known that the six thousand pounds was Tom's own money, and that, although the mortgage was made out in another name, it was to Tom alone that he was indebted.

"Have you made up your mind as to the price you intend to ask, sir?"

"No, not yet. In fact, it was partly to consult you on that point that I sent for you."

"Somewhere about nine thousand pounds, sir, I should think, would be a fair price."

The Squire shook his head. "They will never give anything like so much as that."

"I think they will, sir, if the affair is judiciously managed. How can they refuse in the face of a mortgage for six thousand pounds?"

"There's something in that, certainly."

"Then there are the villas—yet unbuilt it is true—but the plans of which are already drawn, and the foundations of some of which are already laid. You will require to be liberally remunerated for your disappointment and outlay in respect of them."

"I see it all now. Splendid idea that of the villas."

"Considering the matter in all its bearings, nine thousand pounds may be regarded as a very moderate sum."

"I won't ask a penny less."

"With it you will be able to clear off both the mortgage and the loan of two thousand, and will then have a thousand left for your expenses in connection with the villas."

The Squire rubbed his hands. "I wish all my speculations had turned out as successful as this one," he said. "This one I owe to you, Bristow. You have done me a service that I can never forget."

Tom rose to go. "Mrs. McDermot quite well, sir?" he said, with the most innocent air in the world.

"If the way she eats and drinks is anything to go by, she was never better in her life. But if you take her own account, she's never well—a confirmed invalid she calls herself. I've no patience with the woman, though she is my sister. A day's hard scrubbing at the wash-tub every week would do her a world of good. If she would only pack up her trunks and go, how thankful I should be!"

"If you wish her to shorten her visit at Pincote, I think you might easily persuade her to do so."

"I'd give something to find out how. No, no, Bristow, you may depend that she's a fixture here for the next three or four months. She knows—no woman alive better—when she's in comfortable quarters."

"If I had your sanction to doing so, sir, I think that I could induce her to hasten her departure from Pincote."

The Squire rubbed his nose thoughtfully. "You are a queer fellow, Bristow," he said, "and you have done some strange things, but to induce my sister to leave Pincote before she's ready to go will cap all that you've done yet."

"I cannot of course induce her to leave Pincote till she is willing to go, but after a little quiet talk with me, it is possible that she may be willing, and even anxious, to get away as quickly as possible."

The Squire shook his head. "You don't know Fanny McDermot as well as I do," he said.

"Have I your permission to try the experiment?"

"You have—and my devoutest wishes for your success. Only you must not compromise me in any way in the matter."

"You may safely trust me not to do that. But you must give me an invitation to come and stay with you at Pincote for a week."

"With all my heart."

"I shall devote myself very assiduously to Mrs. McDermot, so that you must not be surprised if we seem to be very great friends in the course of a couple of days."

"Do as you like, boy. I'll take no notice. But she's an old soldier, is Fan, and if for a single moment she suspects what you are after, she'll nail her colours to the mast, defy us all, and stop here for six months longer."

"It is, of course, quite possible that I may fail," said Tom, "but somehow, I hardly think that I shall."

"We'll have a glass of sherry together and drink to your success. By-the-bye, have you contrived yet to purge your brain of that love-sick tomfoolery?"

"If, sir, you intend that phrase to apply to my feelings with regard to Miss Culpepper, I can only say that they are totally unchanged."

"What an idiot you are in some things, Bristow!" said the Squire, crustily. "Remember this—I'll have no love-making here next week."

"You need have no fear on that score, sir."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EXIT MRS. MACDERMOT.

Tom and his portmanteau reached Pincote together a few days after his last conversation with the Squire. Mrs. McDermot understood that he had been invited to spend a week there in order to assist her brother with his books and farm accounts. It seemed to her a very injudicious thing to do, but she did not say much about it. In truth, she was rather pleased than otherwise to have Tom there. It was dreadfully monotonous to have to spend one evening after another with no company save that of her brother and Jane. She was tired of her audience, and her audience were tired of her. Mr. Bristow, as she knew already, could talk well, was lively company, and, above all things, was an excellent listener. She had done her duty by her brother in warning him of what was going on between Mr. Bristow and her niece; if, after that, the Squire chose to let the two young people come together, it was not her place to dispute his right to do so.

Tom was very attentive to her at dinner that day. Of Jane he took no notice beyond what the occasion absolutely demanded. Mrs. McDermot was agreeably surprised. "He has come to his senses at

last, as I thought he would," she said to herself. "Grown tired of Jane's society, and no wonder. There's nothing in her."

As soon as the cloth was removed, Jane excused herself on the score of a headache and left the room. The Squire got into an easy chair and settled himself down for a post-prandial nap. Tom moved his chair a little nearer that of the widow.

"I have grieved to see you so far from well, Mrs. McDermot," he said, as he poured himself out another glass of wine. "My father was a doctor, and I suppose I caught the habit from him of reading the signs of health or sickness in people's faces."

Mrs. McDermot was visibly discomposed. She was a great coward with regard to her health, and Tom knew it.

"Yes," she said, "I have not been well for some time past. But I was not aware that the traces of my indisposition were so plainly visible to others."

"They are visible to me because, as I tell you, I am half a doctor both by birth and bringing up. You seem to me, Mrs. McDermot, pardon me for saying so,—to have been fading—to have been going backward, as it were, almost from the day of your arrival at Pincote."

Mrs. McDermot coughed and moved uneasily in her chair. "I have been a confirmed invalid for years," she said, querulously, "and yet no one will believe me when I tell them so."

"I can very readily believe it," said Tom, gravely. Then he lapsed into an ominous silence.

"I—I did not know that I was looking any worse now than when I first came to Pincote," she said at last.

"You seem to me to be much older-looking, much more careworn, with lines making their appearance round your eyes and mouth, such as I never noticed before. So, at least, it strikes me, but I may be, and I dare say I am, quite wrong."

The widow seemed at a loss what to say. Tom's words had evidently rendered her very uneasy. "Then what would you advise me to do?" she said, after a time. "If you can detect the disease so readily, you should have no difficulty in specifying the remedy."

"Ah, now I am afraid you are getting beyond my depth," said Tom, with a smile. "I am little more than a theorizer, you know; but I should have no hesitation in saying that your disorder is connected with the mind."

"Gracious me, Mr. Bristow!"

"Yes, Mrs. McDermot; my opinion is that you are suffering from an undue development of brain power."

The widow looked puzzled. "I was always considered rather intellectual," she said, with a glance at her brother. But the Squire still slept.

"You are very intellectual, madam; and that is just where the evil lies."

"Excuse me, but I fail to follow you."

"You are gifted with a very large and a very powerful brain," said Tom, with the utmost gravity. The Squire snorted suddenly in his sleep. The widow held up a warning finger. There was silence in the room till the Squire's gentle long-drawn snores announced that he was again happily fast asleep.

"Very few of us are so specially gifted," resumed Tom. "But every special gift necessitates a special obligation in return. You, with your massive brain, must find that brain plenty of work to do—a sufficiency of congenial employment—otherwise it will inevitably turn upon itself, grow morbid and hypochondriacal, and slowly but surely deteriorate, till it ends by becoming—what I hardly like to say."

"Really, Mr. Bristow, this conversation is to me most interesting," said the widow. "Your views are thoroughly original, but, at the same time, I feel that they are perfectly correct."

"The sphere of your intellectual activity is far too narrow and confined," resumed Tom; "your brain has not sufficient pabulum to keep it in a state of healthy activity. You want to mix more with the world—to mix more with clever people, like yourself. It was never intended by Nature that you should lose yourself among the narrow coteries of provincial life: the metropolis claims you: the world at large claims you. A conversationalist so brilliant, so incisive, with such an exhaustless fund of new ideas, can only hope to find her equals among the best circles of London or Parisian society."

"How thoroughly you appreciate me, Mr. Bristow!" said the widow, all in a flutter of gratified vanity, as she edged her chair still closer to Tom. "It is as you say. I feel that I am lost here—that I am altogether out of my element. I stay here more as a matter of duty—of principle—than of anything else. Not that it is any gratification to me, as you may well imagine, to be buried alive in this dull hole. But my brother is getting old and infirm—breaking fast, I'm afraid, poor man," here the Squire gave a louder snore than common; "while Jane is little more than a foolish girl. They both need the guidance of a kind but firm hand. The interests of both demand a clear brain to look after them."

"My dear madam, I agree with you in toto. Your Spartan views with regard to the duties of every-day life are mine exactly. But we must not forget that we have still another duty—that of carefully preserving our health, especially when our lives are invaluable to the epoch in which we live. You, my dear madam, are killing yourself by inches."

"Oh, Mr. Bristow, not quite so bad as that, I hope!"

"What I say, I say advisedly. I think that, without difficulty, I can

specify a few symptoms of the cerebral disorder to which you are a victim. You will bear me out if what I say is correct."

"Yes, yes; please go on."

"You are a sufferer from sleeplessness to a certain extent. The body would fain rest, being tired and worn out, but the active brain will not allow it to do so. Am I right, Mrs. McDermot?"

"I cannot dispute the accuracy of what you say."

"Your nature being large and eminently sympathetic, but not finding sufficient vent for itself in the narrow circle to which it is condemned, busies itself, for lack of other aliment, with the concerns and daily doings of those around it, giving them the benefit of its vast experience and intuitive good sense; but being met sometimes with coldness instead of sympathy, it collapses, falls back upon itself, and becomes morbid for want of proper intellectual companionship. May I hope that you follow me?"

"Yes—yes, perfectly," said the widow, but looking somewhat mystified, notwithstanding.

"The brain thus thrown back upon itself engenders an irritability of the nerves, which is altogether abnormal. Fits of peevishness, of ill-temper, of causeless fault-finding, gradually supervene; till at length all natural amiability of disposition vanishes entirely, and there is nothing left but a wretched hypochondriac, a misery to himself and all around him."

"Gracious me! Mr. Bristow, what a picture! But I hope you do not put me down as a misery to myself and all around me."

"Far from it—very far from it—my dear Mrs. McDermot. You are only in the premonitory stage at present. Let us hope that, in your case, the later stages will not follow."

"I hope not, with all my heart."

"Of course, you have not yet been troubled with hearing voices?"

"Hearing voices! Whatever do you mean, Mr. Bristow?"

"One of the worst symptoms of the cerebral disorder, from the earlier stages of which you are now suffering, is that the patient hears voices—or fancies that he hears them, which is pretty much the same thing. Sometimes they are strange voices; sometimes they are the voices of relatives, or friends no longer among the living. In short, to state the case as briefly as possible, the patient is haunted."

"I declare, Mr. Bristow, that you quite frighten me!"

"But there are no such symptoms as these about you at present, Mrs. McDermot. The moment you have the least experience of them—should such a misfortune ever overtake you—then take my advice, and seek the only remedy that can be of any real benefit to you."

"And what may that be?"

"Immediate change of scene—a change total and complete. Go abroad. Go to Italy; go to Egypt; go to Africa;—in short, to any place

where the change is a radical one. But I hope that, in your case, such a necessity will never arise."

"All this is most deeply interesting to me, Mr. Bristow, but at the same time it makes me very nervous. The very thought of being haunted in the way you mention is enough to keep me from sleeping for a week."

At this moment Jane came into the room, and a few minutes later the Squire awoke. Tom had said all that he wanted to say, and he gave Mrs. McDermot no further opportunity for private conversation with him.

Next day, too, Tom carefully avoided the widow. His object was to afford her ample time to think over what he had said. That day the vicar and his wife dined at Pincote, and Tom became immersed in local politics with the Squire and the Parson. Mrs. McDermot was anxious and uneasy. That evening she talked less than she had ever been known to do before.

The rule at Pincote was to keep early hours. It was not much past ten o'clock when Mrs. McDermot left the drawing-room, and having obtained her bed-candle, set out on her journey to her own room. Half way up the staircase stood Mr. Bristow. The night being warm and balmy for the time of year, the staircase window was still half open, and Tom stood there, gazing out into the moonlit garden. Mrs. McDermot stopped, and said a few gracious words to him. She would have liked to resume the conversation of the previous evening, but that was evidently neither the time nor the place to do so; so she said good night, shook hands, and went on her way, leaving Tom still standing by the window. Higher up, close to the head of the stairs, stood a very large, old-fashioned case clock. Mrs. McDermot held up her candle to see the time as she was passing it. It was nearly twenty minutes past ten. But at the very moment of her noting this fact, there came three distinct taps from the inside of the case, and next instant from the same place came the sound of a hollow, ghost-like voice. "Fanny —Fanny—list! I want to speak to you," said the voice, in slow, solemn tones. But Mrs. McDermot did not wait to hear more. She screamed, dropped her candle, and staggered back against the opposite wall. Tom was by her side in a moment.

"My dear Mrs. McDermot, whatever is the matter?" he said.

"The voice! did you not hear the voice?" she gasped.

"What voice? whose voice?" said Tom, with an arm round her waist.

"A voice which spoke to me out of the clock!" she said, with a shiver.

"Out of the clock?" said Tom. "We can soon see whether anybody's hidden there." Speaking thus, he withdrew his arm and flung open the door of the clock. Enough light came from the lamp on the

stairs to show that the old case was empty of everything, save the weights, chains, and pendulum.

"Wherever else the voice may have come from, it is plain that it couldn't come from here," said Tom, as he proceeded to relight the widow's candle.

"It came from there, I'm quite certain. There were three distinct raps from the inside as well."

"Is it not possible that it may have been a mere hallucination on your part? You have not been well, you know, for some time past."

"Whatever it may have been, it was very terrible," said Mrs. McDermot, drawing her skirts round her with a shudder. "I have not forgotten what you told me yesterday."

"Allow me to accompany you as far as your room door," said Tom.

"Thanks. I shall feel obliged by your doing so. You will say nothing of all this down stairs?"

"I should not think of doing so."

The following day Mr. Bristow was not at luncheon. There were one or two inquiries, but no one seemed to know exactly what had become of him. It was Mrs. McDermot's usual practice to retire to the library for an hour after luncheon—which room she generally had all to herself at such times—for the ostensible purpose of reading the newspapers, but, it may be, quite as much for the sake of a quiet sleep in the huge leathern chair that stood by the library fire. On going there as usual after luncheon to-day, what was the widow's surprise to find Mr. Bristow sitting there fast asleep, with the *Times* at his feet where it had dropped from his relaxed fingers.

She stepped up to him on tiptoe and looked closely at him. "Rather nice-looking," she said to herself. "Shall I disturb him, or not?"

Her eyes caught sight of some written documents lying out-spread on the table a little distance away. The temptation was too much for her. Still on tip-toe, she crossed to the table in order to examine them. But hardly had she stooped over the table when the same hollow voice that had sounded in her ears the previous night spoke to her again, and froze her to the spot where she was standing. "Fanny McDermot, you must get away from this house," said the voice. "If you stop here you will be a dead woman in three months!"

She was too terrified to look round or even to stir, but her trembling lips did at last falter out the words: "Who are you?"

The answer came. "I am your husband, Geoffrey. Be warned in time."

Then there was silence, and in a minute or two the widow ventured to look round. There was no one there except Mr. Bristow, fast asleep. She managed to reach the door without disturbing him, and from thence made the best of her way to her own room.

Two hours later Tom was encountered by the Squire. The latter

was one broad smile. "She's going at last," he said. "Off to-morrow like a shot. Just told me."

"Then, with your permission, I won't dine with you this evening. I don't want to see her again."

"But how on earth have you managed it?" asked the Squire.

"By means of a little simple ventriloquism—nothing more. But I see her coming this way. I'm off." And off he went, leaving the Squire staring after him in open-mouthed astonishment.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DIRTY JACK.

THERE was one thing that puzzled both General St. George and Lionel Dering, and that was the persistent way in which Kester St. George stayed on at Park Newton. It had, in the first place, been a matter of some difficulty to get him to Park Newton at all, and for some time after his arrival it had been evident to all concerned that he had made up his mind that his stay there should be as brief as possible. But after that never-to-be-forgotten night when the noise of ghostly footsteps was heard in the nailed-up room—a circumstance which both his uncle and his cousin had made up their minds would drive him from the house for ever—he ceased to talk much about going away. Week passed after week and still he stayed on. Nor could his uncle, had he been desirous of doing so, which he certainly was not, have hinted to him, even in the most delicate possible way, that his room would be more welcome than his company, after the pressure which he had put upon him only a short time previously to induce him to remain.

Nothing could have suited Lionel's plans better than that his cousin should continue to live on at Park Newton, but he was certainly puzzled to know what his reason could be for so doing; and, in such a case, to be puzzled was, to a certain extent, to be disquieted.

But much as he would have liked to do so, Kester had a very good reason for not leaving Park Newton at present. He was, in fact, afraid to do so. After the affair of the footsteps he had decided that it would not be advisable to go away for a little while. It would never do for people to say that he had been driven away by the ghost of Percy Osmond. It was while thus lingering on from day to day that he had ridden over to see Mother Mim. One result of his interview was that he felt how utterly unsafe it would be for him to quit the neighbourhood till she was safely dead and buried. She might send for him at any moment, she might have other things to speak to him about which it behoved him to hear. She might change her mind at the last moment, and decide to tell to some other person what she had already told

him; and when she should die, it would doubtless be to him that application would be made to bury her. All things considered, it was certainly unadvisable that he should leave Park Newton yet awhile.

Day after day he waited with smothered impatience for some further tidings of Mother Mim. But day after day he waited in vain. Most men under such circumstances would have gone to the place and have made personal enquiries for themselves. This was precisely what Kester St. George told himself that he ought to do, but for all that he did not do it. He shrank, with a repugnance which he could not overcome, from the thought of any further contact with either Mother Mim or her surroundings. His tastes, if not refined, were fastidious, and a shudder of disgust ran through him as often as he remembered that if what Mother Mim had said were true—and there was something that rang terribly like truth in her words—then was she—that wretched creature—his mother, and the filthy hut in which she lay dying his sole home and heritage. He knew that for the sake of his own interest—of his own safety—he ought to go and see again this woman who called herself his mother, but three weeks had come and gone before he could screw his courage up to the pitch requisite to induce him to do so.

But before this came about, Kester St. George had been left for the time being, with the exception of certain servants, the sole occupant of Park Newton. Lionel Dering had gone down to Bath to seek an interview with Pierre Janvard, with what result has been already seen. Two days after Lionel's departure, General St. George was called away by the sudden illness of an old Indian friend to whom he was most warmly attached. He left home expecting to be back in four or five days at the latest; whereas, as it fell out, he did not reach home again for several weeks.

It was one day when thus left alone, and when the solitude was becoming utterly intolerable to him, that Kester made up his mind that he would no longer be a coward, but would go that very afternoon and see for himself whether Mother Mim were alive or dead. But even after he had thus determined that there should be no more delay on his part, he played fast and loose with himself as to whether he should go or not. Had there come to him any important letter or telegram demanding his presence fifty miles away, he would have caught at it as a drowning man catches at a straw. The veriest excuse would have sufficed for the putting off of his journey for at least one day. But the dull hours wore themselves away without relief or change of any kind for him, and when three o'clock came, having first dosed himself heavily with brandy, he rang the bell and ordered his horse to be brought round. What might not the next few hours bring to him? he asked himself as he rode down the avenue. They might perchance be pregnant with doom. Or death might already have lifted this

last bitter burden from his life by sealing with his bony fingers the only lips that had power to do him harm.

For nearly a fortnight past the weather had been remarkably mild, balmy, and open for the time of year. Everybody said how easily old winter was dying. But during the previous night there had come a bitter change. The wind had suddenly veered round to the north-east, and was still blowing steadily from that quarter. Steadily and bitterly it blew, chilling the hearts of man and beast with its icy breath, stopping the growth of grass and flowers, killing every faintest gleam of sunshine, and bringing back the reign of winter in its cruellest form.

Heavy and lowering looked the sky, shrilly through the still bare branches whistled the ice-cold wind, as Kester St. George, deep in thought, rode slowly through the park. He buttoned his coat more closely around him, and pulled his hat more firmly over his brows as he turned out of the lodge gates, and setting his face full to the wind, urged his horse into a gallop, and was quickly lost to view down the winding road.

It would not have taken him long to reach the edge of Burley Moor had not his horse suddenly fallen lame. For the last two miles of the distance his pace was reduced to a slow walk. This so annoyed Kester that he decided to leave his horse at the road-side tavern in the last hamlet he had to pass through, and to traverse the remainder of the distance on foot. A short three miles across the moor would take him to Mother Mim's cottage.

To a man such as Kester a three miles' walk was a rather formidable undertaking—or, at least, it was an uncommon one. But there was no avoiding it on the present occasion, unless he gave up the object of his journey and went back home. But he could by no means bear the thought of doing that. In proportion with the hesitation and reluctance which he had previously shown to ascertain either the best or the worst of the affair, was the anxiety which now possessed him to reach his journey's end. His imagination pictured all kinds of possible and impossible evils as likely to accrue to him, and he cursed himself again and again for his negligence in not making the journey long ago.

Very bleak and cold was that walk across the desolate, lonely moor, but Kester St. George, buried in his own thoughts, hardly felt or heeded anything of it. All the sky was clouded and overcast, but far away to the north a still darker bank of cloud was creeping slowly up from the horizon.

The wind blew in hollow fitful gusts. Any one learned in such lore would have said that a change of weather was imminent.

When about half-way across the moor he halted for a moment to gather breath. On every side of him spread the dull treeless expanse.

Nowhere was there another human being to be seen. He was utterly alone. "If a man crossing here were suddenly stricken with death," he muttered to himself, "what a place this would be to die in! His body might lie here for days—for weeks even—before it was found."

At length Mother Mim's cottage was reached. Everything about it looked precisely the same as when he had seen it last. It seemed only like a few hours since he had left it. There, too, crouched on the low wall outside, with her skirt drawn over her head, was Mother Mim's grand-daughter, the girl with the black glittering eyes, looking as if she had never stirred from the spot since he was last there. She made no movement or sign of recognition when he walked up to her, but her eyes were full of a cold keen criticism of him, far beyond her age and appearance.

"How is your grandmother?" said Kester, abruptly. He did not like being stared at as she stared at him.

"She's dead."

"Dead!" It was no more than he expected to hear, and yet he could not hear it altogether unmoved.

"Aye, as dead as a door nail. And a good job too. It was time she went."

"How long has she been dead?" asked Kester, ignoring the latter part of the girl's speech.

"Just half an hour."

Another surprise for Kester. He had expected to hear that she had been dead several days—a week perhaps. But only half an hour!

"Who was with her when she died?" he asked, after a minute's pause.

"Me and Dirty Jack."

"Dirty Jack! who is he?"

"Why, Dirty Jack. Everybody knows him. He lives in Duxley, and has a wooden leg, and does writings for folk."

"Does writings for folk!" A shiver ran through Kester. "And has he been doing anything for your grandmother?"

"That he has. A lot."

"A lot—about what?"

"About you."

"About me? Why about me?"

"Oh, you never came near. Nobody never came near. Granny got tired of it. 'I'll have my revenge,' said she. So she sent for Dirty Jack, and he took it all down in writing."

"Took it all down in writing about me?"

She nodded her head in the affirmative.

"If you know so much, no doubt you know what it was that he took down—eh?"

"Oh, I know right enough."

"Why not tell me?"

"I know all about it, but I ain't a-going to split."

Further persuasion on Kester's part had no other effect than to induce the girl to assert in still more emphatic terms that "she wasn't a-going to split."

Evidently nothing more was to be got from her. But she had said enough already to confirm his worst fears. Mother Mim, out of spite for the neglect with which he had treated her, had made a confession at the last moment, similar in purport to what she had told him when last there. Such a confession—if not absolutely dangerous to him—she having assured him that none of the witnesses were now living—might be made a source of infinite annoyance to him. Such a story once made public might bring forth witnesses and evidence from twenty hitherto unsuspected quarters, and fetter him round, link by link, with a chain of evidence from which he might find it impossible to extricate himself. At every sacrifice, Mother Mim's Confession must be destroyed or suppressed. Such were some of the thoughts that passed through Kester's mind as he stood there biting his nails. Again and again he cursed himself in that he had allowed any such confession to emanate from the dead woman, whose silence a little extra kindness on his part would have effectually secured.

"And where is this Dirty Jack, as you call him?" he said, at last.

"He's in there"—indicating the hut with a jerk of her head—"fast asleep."

"Fast asleep in the same room with your grandmother!"

"Why not? He had a bottle of whiskey with him which he kept sucking at. At last he got half screwy, and when all was over he said he would have a snooze by the fire and pull himself together a bit before going home."

Kester said no more, but going up to the hut, opened the door and went in. On the pallet at the farther end lay the dead woman, her body faintly outlined through the sheet that had been drawn over her. A clear fire was burning in the broken grate, and close to it, on the only chair in the place, sat a man fast asleep. His hands were grimy, his linen was yellow, his hair was frowsy. He was a big bulky man, with a coarse, hard face, and was dressed in faded threadbare black. He had a wooden leg, which just now was thrust out towards the fire and seemed as if it were basking in the comfortable blaze.

On the chimney-piece was an empty spirit-bottle, and in a corner near at hand were deposited a broad-brimmed hat, greasy and much the worse for wear, and a formidable looking walking-stick.

Such was the vision of loveliness that met the gaze of Kester St. George as he paused for a moment or two just inside the cottage door. Then he coughed and advanced a step or two. As he did so the man suddenly opened his eyes, got up quickly but awkwardly out of his chair, and laid his hand on something that was hidden in an inner

pocket of his coat. "No, you don't!" he cried, with a wave of his hand. "No, you don't! None of your hanky-panky tricks here. They won't go down with Jack Skeggs, so you needn't try 'em on!"

Kester stared at him in unconcealed disgust. It was evident that he was still under the partial influence of what he had been drinking.

"Who are you, sir, and what are you doing here?" asked Kester, sternly.

"I am John Skeggs, Esquire, attorney-at-law, at your service. And who may you be, sir? But there—I know who you are well enough. You are Mr. Kester St. George, of Park Newton. I have seen you before. I saw you on the day of the murder trial. You were one of the witnesses, and white enough you looked. Anybody who had a good look at you in the box that day would never be likely to forget your face again."

Kester turned aside for a moment to hide the sudden nervous twitching of his lips.

"I'm sorry the whiskey is done," said Mr. Skeggs, with a regretful look at the empty bottle. "I should like you and I to have had a drain together. I suppose you don't do anything in this line?" From one pocket he produced an old clasp-knife, and from the other a cake of leaf tobacco. Then he cut himself a plug and put it into his mouth. "When one friend fails me, then I fall back upon another," he said. "When I can't get whiskey I must have tobacco."

There was no better known character in Duxley than Mr. Skeggs. "Dirty Jack," or "Drunken Jack," were the soubriquets by which he was generally known, and neither of those terms was applied to him without good and sufficient reason. There could be no doubt as to the man's shrewdness, ability, and knowledge of common law. He was a great favourite among the lower and the very lowest classes of Duxley society, who in their legal difficulties never thought of employing any other lawyer than Skeggs, the universal belief being that if anybody could pull them through, either by hook or crook, Dirty Jack was that man. And it is quite possible that Mr. Skeggs's clients were not far wrong in their belief.

"No good stopping here any longer," said Skeggs, when he had put back his knife and tobacco into his pocket.

"No, I suppose not," said Kester.

"I suppose you will see that everything is done right and proper by our poor dear departed?"

"Yes, I suppose there is no one to look to but me. She was my foster-mother, and very kind to me when I was a lad."

"His foster-mother! Listen to that! His foster-mother! ha! ha!" sniggered Dirty Jack. Then laying a finger on one side his nose, and leering up at Kester with horrible familiarity, he added: "We know

all about that little affair, Mr. St. George, and a very pretty romance it is."

"Look you here, Mr. Skeggs, or whatever your dirty name may be," said Kester, sternly, "I'd advise you to keep a civil tongue in your head, or it may be worse for you. I've thrashed bigger men than you in my time. Be careful, or I shall thrash you."

"I like your pluck, on my soul I do!" said Skeggs, heartily. "If you're not genuine silver—and you know you ain't—you're a deuced good imitation of the real thing. Thoroughly well plated, that's what you are. Anyone would take you to be a born gentleman, they would really. Which way are you going back?"

Kester hesitated a moment. Should he quarrel with this man and set him at defiance, or should he not? Could he afford to quarrel with him? that was the question. Perhaps it would be as well to keep from doing so as long as possible.

"I'm going to walk back across the moor as far as Sedgeley," said Kester.

"Then I'll walk with you—though three miles is rather a big stretch to do with my game leg. I can get a gig from there that will take me home."

Kester shrugged his shoulders, but made no comment. Skeggs took up his hat and stick, and proceeded to polish the former article with his sleeve.

"Queer woman that," he said, with a jerk of his thumb towards the bed—"very queer. Hard as nails. With something heroic about her, to my mind—something that under different circumstances might have developed her into a remarkable woman. Well, that's the way with heaps of us. Circumstances are dead against us, and we are not strong enough to overmaster them; else should we smite the world with a dim surprise, and genius would not be so scarce in the market as it is now."

Kester stared. Was this the half-drunken blackguard who had been jeering at him but two minutes ago? "And yet, drunk he must be," added Kester to himself. "No fellow in his senses would talk such precious rot."

"Your obedient, sir," said Skeggs, with a purposely exaggerated bow as he held open the door for Mr. St. George to pass out.

The girl was still sitting on the wall with her skirt drawn over her head. Kester went up to her. "I will send some one along first thing to-morrow morning to see to the funeral and other matters," he said, "if you can manage till then."

"Oh, I can manage right enough. Why not?" said the girl.

"I thought that perhaps you might not care to be in the house by yourself all night."

"Oh, I don't mind that."

"Then you are not afraid?"

"What's there to be frittened of? She's quiet enough now. I shall make up a jolly fire, and have a jolly supper, and then a jolly long sleep. And that's what I've not had for weeks. And I shall read the Dream Book. She can't keep that from me now. I know where it is. It's in the bed right under her. But I'll have it." She laughed and nodded her head, then putting a nut into her mouth she cracked it and began to pick out the kernel. Kester turned away.

"Nell, my good girl," said Mr. Skeggs, insinuatingly, "just see whether there is'nt such a thing as a drop of whiskey somewhere about the house. I've an awful pain in my chest."

"There's no whiskey—not a drop—but I know where there's half a bottle of gin. Give me five shillings and I'll fetch it."

"Five shillings for half a bottle of gin! Why, Nell, what a greedy young pig you must be!"

"Don't have it, then. Nobody axed you. I can drink it myself."

"I'll give you three shillings for it. Come now."

"Not a meg less than five will I take," said Nell, emphatically, as she cracked another nut.

"Why, you young viper, have you no conscience at all?" he cried savagely. Then seeing that Nell took no further notice of him, he turned to Kester. "I find that I have no loose silver about me," he said. "Oblige me with the loan of a couple of half-crowns till we get to Sedgeley." Whenever Mr. Skeggs made a new acquaintance he always requested the loan of a couple of half-crowns before parting from him. But the half-crowns were never paid back until asked for, and asked for more than once.

A few premonitory flakes of snow were darkening the air as Kester St. George and Mr. Skeggs started on their way back across Burley Moor, the latter with a thick comforter round his neck and the bottle of gin stowed carefully away in the tail pocket of his coat. The cold seemed more intense than ever, but the wind had fallen altogether.

"We are going to have a rough night," said Skeggs as he stepped sturdily out. "We must contrive to get across the moor before the snow comes down very thick, or we shall stand a good chance of losing our way. Only the winter before last a pedlar and his wife were lost in the snow within a mile of here, and their bodies not found for a fortnight. This sudden change will play the devil with the young crops."

Kester did not answer. Far different matters occupied his thoughts. In silence they walked on for a little while.

"I suppose you could give a pretty good guess," said Skeggs at length, "at my reasons for asking you which way you were going to walk this afternoon?"

"Indeed, no," said Kester with a shrug. "I have not the remotest

idea, nor do I care to know. It was you who chose to accompany me. I did not thrust my company upon you."

Skeggs laughed a little maliciously. "I don't think there's much good, Mr. Kester St. George, in you and I beating about the bush. I'm a plain man of business, and that reminds me,"—interrupting himself with a chuckle—"that when I once used those very words to a client of mine, he retorted by saying, 'You are more than a plain man of business, Mr. Skeggs—you are an ugly one.' I did my very utmost for that man, but he was hanged. Mais revenons. I am a plain man of business, and I intend to deal with this question in a business-like way. The simple point is: What is it worth your while to give me for the document I have buttoned up here?" tapping his chest with his left hand as he spoke.

"I am at a loss to know to what document you refer," said Mr. St. George, coldly.

"A very few words will tell you the contents of it, though, if I am rightly informed, you can give a pretty good guess already as to what they are likely to be. In this document it is asserted that you, sir, have no right to the name by which the world has known you for so long a time—that you have no right to the position you occupy, to the property you claim as yours. That you are, in fact, none other than the son of Mother Mim herself—of the woman who lies dead in yonder hut."

Kester drew in his breath with something like a sigh. It was as he had feared. Mother Mim had told everything, and, of all people in the world, to the wretch now walking by his side. He braced his nerves for the coming encounter. "I have heard something before to-day of the rigmarole of which you speak," he said, haughtily; "but I need hardly tell you that the affair is nothing but a tissue of vilest lies from beginning to end."

"I daresay it is," said Skeggs, good humouredly. "But it may be rather difficult for you to prove that it is so."

"It will be still more difficult for you to prove that it is not so."

"Oh! I am quite aware of all the difficulties both for and against—no man more so. You have got possession, and a hundred other points in your favour. Still, with what evidence I have already, and what evidence I can get elsewhere, I should be able to make out a strong case—a very strong case against you in a court of justice."

"Evidence elsewhere!" said Kester, disdainfully. "There is no such thing, unless you are clever enough to make the dead speak."

"Even that has been done before now," said Skeggs, quietly. "But in this case we have no need to go to the churchyard to collect our evidence. I have a living, breathing witness whom I can lay my hands on at a day's notice."

"You lie," said Kester, emphatically.

"I'll wash that down," said Skeggs, halting for a moment and proceeding to take a good pull at his bottle of gin. "If you so far forget yourself again, I shall begin to feel sure that you are not a St. George. What I told you was not a lie. There were four witnesses who had all a personal knowledge of a certain fact. Three of those witnesses are dead: the fourth still lives. Of the existence of this fourth witness Mother Mim never gave a hint to you. It was her trump card, and she was far too cunning to let you see it."

Kester walked on in silence. He felt that just then he had hardly a word to say. Was all that he had sacrificed so much for in other ways, all that he had run such tremendous risks for, to be torn from him by the machinations of a vile old hag, and the drunken, ribald scoundrel by his side? Through what strange ambushes, through what dusky by-paths, doth Fate oft-times overtake us! We look back along the broad highway we have been traversing, and seeing no black shadow dogging our footsteps, we go rejoicing on our way; when suddenly, from some near-at-hand shrub, is shot a poisoned arrow, and the sunlight fades from our eyes for ever.

"And now, after this little skirmish," said Skeggs, "we come back to my first question: What can you afford to give me for the document in my pocket?"

"Suppose I say that I will give you nothing—what then?" said Kester, sullenly.

"Then I shall get my evidence together, work out my case on paper, and submit it to the heir-at-law."

"And supposing the heir-at-law, acting under advice, were to decline having anything to do with your case, as you call it?"

"He would be a fool to do that, because my case is anything but a weak one. I tell you this in confidence. But supposing he were to decline, then I should say to him: 'I am willing to conduct this case on my own account. If I fail, it shall not cost you a penny. If I succeed, you shall pay all expenses, and give me five thousand pounds.' That would fetch him, I think."

"You have been assuming all along," said Kester, "that your case is based on fact. I assure you that it is not—that it is nothing but a devilish lie from beginning to end."

"Really, my dear sir, that has little or nothing to do with the matter. I daresay it is a lie. But it is my place to believe it to be the truth, and to make other people believe the same as I do. Here's your very good health, sir." Again Mr. Skeggs took a long pull and a strong pull at his bottle of gin.

"Knowing what you know," said Kester, "and believing what you believe, are you yet willing to sell the document now in your possession?"

"Of course I am. What else is all this jaw for?"

"And don't you think you are a pretty sort of scoundrel to make me any such offer? Don't you think ——"

"Now look you here, Mr. St. George—if that is your name, which I very much doubt—don't let you and I begin to fling mud at one another, because that is a game at which I could lick you into fits. I have made you a fair offer. If we can't come to terms, there's no reason why we shouldn't part friendly."

Once again Kester walked on in silence. The snow had been coming down more thickly for some time past, and already the dull grey moor began to look strange and unfamiliar, but neither of the two men gave more than a passing thought to the weather.

"If you feel and know your case to be such a strong one," said Kester, at last, "why do you come to me at all? Why send a white flag into your enemy's camp! Why not fight him à l'outrance at once?"

"Because I'm neither so young nor so pugnacious as I once was," answered Skeggs. "I go in for peace and quiet now-a-days. I don't want the bother and annoyance of a law-suit. I have no ill-feeling towards you, and if you will only make me a fair offer, I shall be the last man in the world to disturb you in any way. Gemini! how the snow comes down! We are only about half way yet. We shall have some difficulty in picking our road across."

"I myself am as anxious as you can be, Mr. Skeggs, to be saved the trouble and annoyance of a law-suit, however sure I may feel that the result would be in my favour. But you must give me a little time to think this matter over. It is far too important to be decided at a moment's notice."

"Time? To be sure. You can make up your mind in about a couple of days, I suppose. Shall I call upon you, or will you call upon me?"

Hardly were the words out of Mr. Skeggs's mouth when his wooden leg sunk suddenly into a hidden hole in the pathway. Thrown forward by the shock, the lawyer came heavily to the ground, and at the same moment his leg snapped short off just below the knee.

Kester took him by the shoulders and assisted him to assume a sitting posture on the footpath.

Mr. Skeggs's first action was to pick up his broken limb and look at it with a sort of comical despair. "There goes a friend that has done me good service," he said; "but he might have lasted till he got me home, for all that. How the deuce am I to get home?" he asked, turning abruptly to Kester.

Kester paused for a minute and looked round before answering. The snow was coming down faster than ever. The moor was being gradually turned into a huge white carpet. Already its zig-zag paths and winding footways were barely distinguishable from the treacherous bog which lay on every side of them. In an hour and a half it would

be dark with a darkness that would be unrelieved by either moon or stars. If it kept on snowing all night at this rate the drift would be a couple of feet deep by morning. Skeggs's casual remark about the pedlar and his wife, unheeded at the time, now flashed vividly across Kester's mind.

"You will have to wait here till I can get assistance," he said, in answer to his companion's question. "There is no help for it."

"I suppose not," growled Skeggs. "Was ever anything so cursedly unfortunate?"

"Sedgeley is the nearest place to this," said Kester. "There are plenty of men there who know the moor thoroughly. I will send half a dozen of them to your help."

"How soon may I expect them here?"

"In about three quarters of an hour from now."

"Ugh! I'm half frozen now. What shall I be in another hour?"

"Oh, you'll pull through that easily enough. Your bottle is not empty yet."

"Jove! I'd forgotten the bottle," said Skeggs, with animation.

He took it out of his pocket and held it up to the light. "Not more than a quartern left. Well, that's better than none at all."

"Good-bye," said Kester as he shook some of the snow off his hat. "You may look for help in less than an hour."

"Good-bye, Mr. St. George," said Skeggs, looking very earnestly at him as he did so. "You won't forget to send the help, will you? because if you do forget, it will be nothing more nor less than wilful murder."

Kester laughed a short grating laugh. "Fear nothing, Skeggs," he said. "I won't forget. About that other trifle, I will write you in two or three days. Again, good-bye."

Skeggs's face had turned very white. He could not speak. He took off his hat and waved it. Kester responded by a wave of his hand. Then turning on his heel he strode away through the snowy twilight. In three minutes he was lost to sight. Skeggs could no longer see him. Tears came into his eyes. "He'll send no help, not he. I shall die here like a dog. The snow will be my winding-sheet. If ever there was mischief in a man's eye, there was in his as he bade me good-bye."

Onward strode Kester St. George through the blinding snow. Altogether heedless of the weather was he just now. He had other things to think about. As instinctively as an Indian or a backwoodsman tracks his way across prairie or forest did he track his way across the moor, all hidden though the paths now were. He was a child of the moor. He had learned its secrets when a boy, and in his present emergency, reason and intellect must perforce give way to that blind instinct which was left him as a legacy of his youth.

At length the last patch of moorland was crossed, and a few minutes later he found himself close by a well-remembered finger-post where three roads met. One of these roads led to Sedgeley, which was but a short quarter of a mile away; another of them led to Duxley and Park Newton. At Sedgeley his horse was waiting for him. There, too, was to be had the help which he had so faithfully promised Skeggs that he would send. Leaning against the finger-post, he took a minute's rest before going any further. Which road should he take? That was the question which at present he was turning over and over in his mind. Not long did he hesitate. Taking out his pocket-handkerchief, he made a wisp of it and tied it round his throat. Then he turned up the collar of his coat. Then once again he shook the snow off his hat. Then plunging his hands deep in his pockets, and turning his back on the finger-post, he set out resolutely along the road that led towards Park Newton. Once, and once only, did he pause, even for a moment, before reaching home. It was when he fancied that he heard, away in the far distance, a low, wild, melancholy cry—whether the cry of an animal or a man he could not tell—but none the less a cry for help. Whatever it was, it did not come again, and after that Kester pursued his way homeward steadily and without pause. It was quite dark long before he reached his own room.

He changed his clothes and went down to dinner. Both his uncle and Richard Dering were away, and he dined alone, for which he was by no means sorry. Every half-hour or so he inquired as to the weather. They had nothing to tell him except that it was still snowing hard. The evening was one of slow torture, but at length it wore itself away. He went to bed about midnight. Dobbs's last report to him was that the weather was still unchanged. But several times during the night Dobbs heard his master pacing up and down his room, and had he been there he might, ever and again, have seen a haggard face peering out with eager eyes into the darkness.

"Twelve inches of snow, sir, on the drive," was Dobbs's first news next morning. "They say there has not been a fall like it in these parts for a dozen years."

The snow had ceased to fall hours before. By-and-by there came a few gleams of sunshine to brighten the scene, but the wind was still in the north, and all that day the weather kept bitterly cold. Soon after sunset, however, there was a change. Little by little the wind got round to the south-west. At ten o'clock Dobbs reported: "Snow going fast, sir. Regular thaw. Not be a bit left by breakfast time."

"Call me at four," said his master, "and have some coffee ready, and a horse brought round by 4.30."

He was quite tired out by this time, and when he went to bed he felt sure that he should have four or five hours' sound sleep. But his sleep was several times disturbed by a strange dream: always the same

thing repeated over and over again. He dreamt that he was standing under the finger-post on the edge of the moor. But the finger-post was neither more nor less than a gigantic skeleton, of which the outstretched arms formed the direction boards. On the bony palm of one outstretched arm, in letters of blood, was written the words: "To Sedgeley." Then as he read the words in his dream, again would sound in his ears the low, weird, melancholy cry which had arrested his steps for a moment as he walked home through the snow, and hearing the cry he would start up in bed and stare round him, and wonder for a moment where he was.

Dobbs duly called his master at four, and at 4.30 he mounted his horse and rode away. The roads were heavy and sloppy with the melting snow. The morning was intensely dark, but Kester knew the country thoroughly, and was never at a loss as to which turn he ought to take. Not one human being did he meet during the whole of his ride. But, indeed, his nearest friend would have passed him by in the dark without recognition. He wore an old shooting-suit, with a Glengarry bonnet and a macintosh, and had a thick shawl wrapped round his throat and the lower part of his face.

Day was just breaking as he reached the edge of the moor. He tethered his horse to the stump of an old tree behind a hedge. He had brought a powerful field-glass in his pocket. He scanned the moor carefully through it before proceeding farther on his quest. No living being was in sight anywhere. Satisfied of this, he set out without further delay, leaving his horse by itself to await his return. Not without a tremor—not without a faster beating of the heart—did he again set foot on the moor. A drizzling rain now began to fall, but Kester was not sorry for this. The worse the weather, the fewer the people who would be abroad in it. Onward he strode, keeping a wary eye about him as he went.

At length he reached a curve in the path from whence he ought to be able to discern the bulky form of John Skeggs, Esq., if that gentleman was still where he had last seen him. He looked, but the morning was still heavy and dark: he could see nothing. Then he adjusted his glass, and looking through that he could just make out a heap—a bundle—a shapeless something. It required a powerful effort on his part to brace his nerves to the pitch requisite to carry him through the task he had still before him. He had filled a small flask with brandy, and he now drank some of it. Then he started again. A few minutes more and the end of his journey was reached.

There lay Skeggs, on the very spot where he had left him, resting on his side, with one hand under his head, as if asleep. His hat had fallen off. On the ground near him were the empty bottle, his walking-stick, and his broken wooden leg. Numbed by the intense cold, he had fallen asleep while waiting for the help which was never to come, and had so

died, frozen to death. Doubtless his death had been a painless one, but none the less, as he himself would have said, was Kester St. George his murderer.

Gloved though he was, it was not without a feeling of indescribable loathing that Kester could bring himself to touch the body. But it was absolutely necessary to do so. The paper he had come in quest of was in the breast pocket of the dead man's coat. It did not take him long to find it. Having made sure that he had got the right document, he fastened it up in the breast pocket of his own coat. "Now I am safe!" he said to himself. Then he took off his gloves and buried them carefully under a large stone. Then with one last glance at the body, he slunk hurriedly away, cursing in his heart the daylight that was now creeping up so rapidly from the east. In the clear light of dawn the foul deed he had done looked a thousand times fouler than it had looked before.

(*To be concluded.*)

THE MAGNOLIA.

STAINLESS white petals!
Corolla of snow!
Gold in the centre,
All richness and glow:
Bath for Titania
Of crystalline dew,
Couch to lull Oberon
Under the blue.

Cradle for humming-bird!
Butterfly's nest!
Fountain of nectar
For honey-bees' quest!
Goblet for Ganymede,
Full of the wine,
Brewed by Aurora
With fingers divine!

Chalice of spicery,
Fit for a queen!
Crowning a column
Of exquisite green:
Cup to be held in
The hand of a bride,
Pure as thy perfume,
An emperor's pride!

Flower to be laid on
The cross by a tomb!
Type of the spirit
In Paradise—bloom!
Therefore I gather thee,
Lovely and pure;
Speak from this graveyard
Of joys that endure!

JANE DIXON.

IRISH CONVENT LIFE.

By the Author of "Polly."

ACCORDING to the ideas of the multitude, there is always a certain halo of romance surrounding the monastic or conventual life: and yet, in reality, the existence we all lead, who mix freely with the world, has in it far less of the commonplace.

Of course, when the heart of a nun is devoted wholly to God, when she lives to please Him alone, her motives glorify and make sublime any round of duties; but where this is not the case, we know that the monotonous succession of tasks which falls to the lot of the Sisters continually proves wearisome and almost unendurable.

When a novice has outlived the strangeness of her position, she many times longs for the variety of what we call every-day and stupid life; just as some discontented members of a family may sigh after the seclusion of what is popularly termed a religious life. The unknown and untried is often thought to have more charms than it really has.

There are very many monks and nuns in Ireland; and here, as in France, the convents are, for the most part, educational establishments. In some lonely country districts, where but few advantages are to be had in the way of instruction, Protestant gentry are glad to avail themselves of these Romish schools for their children, although the teaching given is, in many cases, far from first-rate.

It is in beautiful, delicate needlework, and in the making of lace of different kinds, that the Irish Sisters excel. There are several houses in the South, each of which is famous for some special kind of manufacture. Persons who are learned in such matters can tell instantly, on looking at a piece of work, at what convent it was done. The crochet made under the superintendence of the Youghal nuns is exquisite, and so fine that it has, in many cases, been mistaken for other kinds of lace. I have heard of a lady who purchased a quantity of what she believed to be old Roman point, in Italy, at a great expense. On bringing it home she took it to her dressmaker, in Dublin, and gave it to her as trimming for a dress, with many cautions against waste, and with repeated orders not to cut it unnecessarily. The woman smiled when she heard the discoloured work called antique point. She got a magnifying-glass, and showed her customer that she had, in reality, bought Irish crochet lace, which had been dipped in some yellowing fluid, in order to give it an appearance of great age. This clever expert was, moreover, able to tell from what part of the country it had originally been procured. Some ladies are very fond of purchasing sleeves and collars of this beautiful work, to wear at the table d'hôte when travelling on the Continent, as it does not require

what is technically termed doing up: when soiled, simple washing and drying will restore it to its pristine daintiness. Besides this, it is quite uninjured by any amount of pressing or crumpling.

There are nuns of many different orders in Ireland. It is the duty of some of these recluses to confine themselves strictly and perpetually within the convent limits: others go about, at times, in couples, closely veiled, for the purpose of ministering to the poor and sick. Their black uniform and absorbed, retiring demeanour always insure a certain amount of interest and respectful admiration from those with whom they come in contact. Although, apparently, blind to all that goes on around them as they pass through the streets, they are ever ready to do an act of kindness. They will pause to comfort a crying child, or to lift a fallen cripple from the ground. When amongst the destitute, they are bound not to shrink from the performance of any office of mercy which offers itself, however painful or disagreeable the task may be.

Protestant nursing sisterhoods are now established in different parts of Ireland, but, where this is not the case, the Romish sœurs can always be had in times of need. The power of securing the presence of one of these in a sick chamber is, on many occasions, an inestimable boon.

The Sisters are not allowed to receive any payment themselves for their services, but a guinea a week is generally charged for their attendance in a family by the Mother Superior of their house, to whom all dues must be paid personally.

The lay Sisters are, generally speaking, persons belonging to the lower classes of society. When a Roman Catholic woman feels what is called a vocation for the religious life, without having means sufficient to enable her to enter a convent as an ordinary nun, she goes in as a subordinate, under the obligation of acting as a servant in the establishment.

I have been told that in Ireland no lady can become a religieuse, and retain her original position, unless she is possessed of property to the value of, at least, £30 a year, which becomes the property of the house she joins as a member.

I have thought that an account of a visit paid by me to a convent in the quaint old town of K—— might interest readers; but before entering on the narration, I will tell how a nun of the Order of the Visitation takes her irrevocable vows upon her.

As she stands before the celebrant, he says to her, "My sister, thou art dead to thyself and to the world; henceforth live only to God."

The other nuns then sing, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord"; and the newly professed sister lies down and is covered with a pall. A nun reads a lesson from the book of Job, and the "De profundis" is chanted. After a prayer the priest sprinkles the pall with holy water, saying, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the

dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The girl rises, and takes from him a taper, upon which he says, "The path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

Then the others sing the words, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"

After another prayer the celebrant gives the newly professed a crucifix, saying, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ which is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." He adds the caution, "God forbid that ye should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

There are, of course, many other ceremonies gone through on such occasions, but the above gives at least an idea of the sad, solemn and impressive scene.

While staying at K—— I was very anxious to inspect the convent there; but it is not at all easy to gain admittance to a nunnery; and so many difficulties offered themselves that I had almost despaired of success, when at last, through the agency of a Roman Catholic acquaintance, who was to accompany us, I and a few friends received the much desired carte of permission to visit the house.

When we presented ourselves at the entrance door we found that it was provided with no knocker or bell. A child almost immediately opened it to us, however. She was one of a number of orphans maintained and educated by the convent. She was dressed in a sort of uniform, and wore a small frilled white cap upon her head. We were shown through a vestibule, into a reception-room.

Here, as elsewhere throughout the building, the floor was uncarpeted and highly polished, while the pure and freshly-painted walls were ornamented with texts of Scripture and prints of lovely pictures, principally, but not exclusively, on sacred subjects. An illustrated copy of the English New Testament lay on a table in the centre of this chamber. A number of foreign copies of the same book, translated into many different languages, were also here, having been presented to the establishment by different ecclesiastics, probably on the occasion of their having visited the house. There were folding-doors at one side of the apartment, and near these were placed two lovely statues, one of the blessed Virgin; the other, doubtless, of St. Joseph.

We were kept waiting some little time, and I had just turned to examine and admire these, when, on a sudden, the Lady Abbess appeared before us. She was a plump, merry-faced, and yet dignified looking woman, and was dressed entirely in black, wearing a robe which swept behind her in a train that seemed to be yards long. Behind her, with subdued and reverent mien, walked a lovely young nun, whom the Mother Superior introduced to us as the Lady Mary Agnese, and to whose charge and ciceroneship she consigned us. "Keep close together,

ladies," laughed the mistress of the house. "I know that Protestants are terribly afraid of being locked up in some of our cells, and of never being released again."

We smiled and bowed as we followed our conductress. She led us up a wide, handsome staircase, adorned, here and there, by statues, placed in niches prepared in the wall for their reception, and by scrolls, appropriate to the subjects represented, painted overhead. Two lay Sisters stood aside to let us pass. Their duty, for the time, consisted in clanging a bell incessantly. As they rang they summoned some particular nun, according to the number of strokes sounded, to do some special task allotted to her. We asked our guide how many recluses lived here, but she said she did not know. "I should at least have to count them up one by one, to be able to answer you correctly," she observed quietly. The cells or sleeping apartments in this part of the house all opened off a long, pleasant, airy and sunshiny corridor or lobby. Each of them contained a small bed draped with green hangings, a table, chair and crucifix. We were not allowed to enter any of these, being only permitted to stand outside and look in.

We were taken, afterwards, into the Noviciate. This was a beautiful room, full of sunbeams and freshness. A long covered table ran up nearly the whole length of the chamber, and on it stood very many desks. Two of these were occupied, one by a girl wearing a white veil, the other by a lady whose face was shrouded from us by a black covering. We lingered here for some time, but neither of them looked up, even for an instant, nor did they by any motion betray consciousness of our presence. Both were writing busily, the novice being employed, as we saw, in copying some old manuscript.

We then turned into a more spacious saloon. It was beautifully, tastefully, and artistically furnished, and a long wide balcony stretched before the windows and overlooked the garden, in which two black-robed figures were promenading, reading as they walked in the shade of some tall trees. The nuns' burial-ground, with its stone crosses, was pointed out to us, and we were shown a couple of green fields, which we were informed belonged also to the convent. Within the limits of this small demesne alone might the Sisters take exercise, except on those occasions when they were sent on errands of mercy.

After this we went through several school-rooms. In the first of these, where needlework only was the order of the day, a naughty child had been made to stand on a pedestal in a corner, with her head enveloped in a large paper bag, as a punishment for some breach of discipline. Visitors did not come to the house every day, and this little girl was so very anxious to catch a glimpse of the strange faces that she tore a hole in her mask, and peeped out at us through it. It was only courteous to make some small purchase here, and I therefore bought a lace collar. Fortunately for the demand made on my purse,

this nunnery was not one of those where the far-famed Irish point is manufactured. This beautiful work is extravagantly dear, the buyers having to pay for the eyes of the girls employed, who continually become blind from the excessive fineness of the materials used and of the stitches put in.

The most interesting school-room visited by us on this occasion was that in which a number of infants were assembled. Some of the wee dots were endeavouring to be very good and solemn over their lessons, while others were dropping off fast asleep; and, as this happened, they were tenderly gathered up by a watchful Sister, and were laid upon a large bed, settled for them all in one corner of the chamber.

Lady Mary Agnese went with us all over the establishment, and finally led us to the door of the convent chapel. Here she paused and crossed herself. One of the nuns was playing a soft voluntary above in the organ-loft, and in the distant dusky choir a swinging lamp was burning before the altar. We asked leave to enter, and our guide said there was no objection to our doing so, provided only that we behaved reverently, and kept silence. Our Roman Catholic friend had, however, hurried on before, and was now calling for us to follow. She talked loudly as she pointed out the sanctuary's tawdry adornments, which she admired, but which we secretly lamented over, as subtracting from that simple beauty and dignity which we Protestants love to see in a building devoted to God. The Roman Catholic people of K—— were free to worship here, but a beautifully carved screen at one side of the chancel partitioned off a sort of inner chamber, or chapel, fitted up for the use of the inhabitants of the convent, who knelt within this division during the celebration of the mass.

I think I have told nearly all that I can now recall of my visit to K—— Nunnery. The lady who accompanied us about the house had a refined and most attractive face. Her appearance was far more winning than that of the other Sisters, with whom we came in contact. Some of the nuns looked very sad: a weary, heavy depression of spirit seemed upon them. Each wore a broad silver ring on the third finger of the left hand, and a rosary was suspended from every girdle.

MISS MILTON.

By HENRY KINGSLEY, Author of "Ravenshoe."

IN all the confusion of the inn at Bouillon, George Dickson could not help noticing that wherever he went one pair of eyes followed him, as if to gain his attention. He, however, said to himself, "You have a tongue, my French friend, and can speak if you choose," and then thought nothing more about the matter, but gazed on the extraordinary scene before him.

The end of the world seemed to have come; people were eating on the floor, on the hearth-stone, on the beds, and on the billiard-table. They were eating indiscriminately everything they could get hold of, and drinking everything which was liquid. Some were still asleep where they had fallen down the night before; others were scarcely yet awake; some, drunk all night, were not yet sober, and some who had slept themselves sober, seemed inclined to get drunk again. There was a ghastly hilarity about the whole thing which disgusted George and made his two companions eagerly acquiesce in immediate departure.

"Let us get on, and get it over," he remarked, "anything is better than these excited boozing wretches."

Then the Frenchman who had watched George came up, and taking him aside said, in perfectly good English, "Sir, I am going to ask for a very great favour. Will you allow me to accompany you?"

"Really, sir," said George, "our expedition is none of the most pleasant or safe."

"Exactly; but you have two passes, while I have actually no papers at all."

"I cannot recommend your going forward, sir."

"No. I should not recommend it myself. I only ask it as a favour. My sister is at school in the town, while yours, Mr. Dickson, is safe in London. Come, sir, go bail for me, and let me go on with you. If London was sacked, I would do the same by you."

"You seem to know me, sir," said George, very much surprised. "If you know much about me, you must be aware that I have trusted a stranger once too often in my life, and that I am not prepared to trust another."

"Don't say that," said the Frenchman. "I know that you are only here as newspaper correspondent. Because you trusted a Frenchman who was false to you, I will not be so. I pray you most earnestly to let me go to the front with you, and get news of my sister. Surely you cannot refuse."

"But, my dear sir, you might be a spy for anything I know," said George.

"Well, I am," was the startling reply, "but not here or in this matter. Had I been acting as a spy I should have had papers; as it is, I have none. I am only a Jesuit, and we are getting much the worst of it. I will swear to you that my only object in going to the front is to see after the safety of my sister. Come, your pass from Bernstorff is signed for yourself and one friend. Make me that friend. I am only a Jesuit."

George Dickson was one of those men who acted first and thought afterwards. He did so on this occasion, and began an acquaintanceship which, by a curious series of accidents, brought him into more trouble than he calculated on.

"Come on," he said, "I will see you through it." His two friends, Markham of the Carabineers, and Marfie of the Bengal Staff Corps, were out in the road, calling for him. He ran into the street and joined them, followed by the young Frenchman. They stepped stoutly forward, carrying their little bags in their hands; but before they had got a hundred yards they were overtaken by a pale young man out of breath. There was no difficulty about allowing him to accompany them; he was the correspondent of the "Indépendence Belge," with papers enough to carry him to Persia, but wanting company because he had the most awful horror of what he was going to see.

What a delicious change it was from the hot, brutal, Belgian public-house to the clear morning air! Aloft in the mist was Godfrey of Bouillon's Castle; below them the Semois crawling over his shingle beds. George always said that it was the most delicious morning walk he ever had in his life. The five men passed on swiftly through the forest; the two English soldiers leading the way, with George and his new French friend bringing up the rear.

"You seem to know a great deal about me," sa d George.

"I do," was the answer. "My cousin, Aime Hebert, was at one time your friend. You were together at school at Dieppe. You knew him when he got older, and you trusted him. He deceived you—for a time—and you had to pay some money for him."

"One hundred and eighty pounds," said George Dickson, ruefully.

"Yes. I thought it was two hundred. I can get that all back for you. He will be able to pay soon, and he will pay. He is a very honest fellow."

"Is he a Jesuit?" asked George.

"A Jesuit! what are you thinking of? No, he is like myself, a Freemason."

"But you said you were a Jesuit," said George.

"I don't think I said that," said the Frenchman.

"You certainly did," said George.

"I am so worried that I do not know what I do say," said the young Frenchman. "What on earth could have induced me to say *that*?"

"I don't know," said George. "Do you know that I do not even know your name?"

"Delaval. Your mother was a Delaval, you know."

"That is certainly true. Do you claim relationship?"

"Not for worlds. I know nothing of you save this: you went security for your fellow-student, Aimé Hebert, who is my cousin. In consequence of his failing, you have to come here as a correspondent to a daily paper, immediately upon having been called to the bar. Hebert can pay now, and for your kindness to-day I will make him. In our society we have power which you do not dream of."

"The Jesuits *are* powerful," said George.

"I have told you once before that I was not a Jesuit," said Delaval.

"And once that you were," said George, laughing. "Well, we need not talk any more. You are something, and you do not choose to tell what. I shall find out some day or another."

"Yes, I suppose so. Meanwhile I have a great friendship for you and I should like it to be reciprocated. We might both of us do one another some good."

George Dickson had a good look at his man, and, sharp young lawyer as he was, could not make him out at all. He was very handsome, shaved like a Frenchman, with no hair on his face except the moustaches; and yet he did not look an entire Frenchman. He said that he was a spy, a Jesuit and a Freemason all in the same breath. What *was* he? He appeared to George Dickson something between a Greek and a Jew when he examined him more nearly. For the reader's satisfaction we may say that he was neither.

"You are a very agreeable companion," said George Dickson, "but to tell you the truth I am in no humour to talk business. What has happened is so ghastly and horrible that I can think of nothing except the awful misfortunes."

"Our people were not prepared for it," said Delaval. "See, your friends are calling us up." The two left off speaking and hurried after the officers and the Belgian war correspondent.

They had crossed the frontier for some time now. The road through the forest continued to be very beautiful, and the weather was heavenly. But in a turn of the road, at a place where the two officers had paused, there were the first signs of war. Eight dead horses, and a lumbering van standing across the road, on which some German wag had chalked "A Berlin."

Then they all walked together. The road still wound up the hillside, above a flashing trout stream, seen far below them in the valley, through trembling leaves. Then there came a turn to the right, and they passed through the solitary street of La Chapelle.

The sight of La Chapelle was not reassuring. It was noticed that the two English officers talked more persistently and that the French-

man grew more silent. In the lanes beyond, they were all silent; and when the real horrors began the Frenchman was missing.

Had the Belgian disappeared the matter was explicable. But that a gallant young Frenchman should be frightened at the sight of the most terrible slaughter which the world has ever seen, was inexplicable. Still, when they got in that awful potato field, the Frenchman was not there.

To describe the field of a great battle is almost impossible. The land seems to be ripped and torn in every direction, in some horrible, unnatural way. The brown earth is turned up in ghastly furrows under the withering trees. The only beautiful things left are the dead, who chequer the wasted land in groups. No one has ever made even a decent attempt at describing the reality: we pass the description of it by as being utterly beyond our powers.

George Dickson stood amongst the dead, and looked around him. The place must have been beautiful at one time, and later travellers have told us that it is once more beautified by nature, though to our eyes it will remain a horrible charnel-house until death. The 17th of the French Line lay in ruins, motionless except where they were being dragged to the trenches by German soldiers.

"Why does God allow such things?" he said aloud.

"There spoke a civilian," said the Bengal officer. "I bet you ten rupees that you see some nature ennobled by this horrible business before the day is over. What do you feel yourself?"

"I feel a terrible, inconceivable pity. I feel as if I could lay down my own life to mend this."

"Then hand me over ten rupees," said the Bengal officer. "For your nature has been ennobled. War is utterly evil, but God brings good out of it somehow. Look at that man: there is a woman on the field, looking at the dead men's faces."

"And there is that Frenchman, Delaval, with her," said George. "That must be his sister. He said she was in the town; but he has told me more lies in one walk than I could believe in a twelvemonth."

"Really," said the Bengal officer. "And yet he does not look like a liar."

"No liar ever does, my dear soldier," said George. "If you were a lawyer you would know that."

There were about 180,000 German men in sight on their left, and they expected the retreating French would make some sign. But they made none.

How clearly one sees it; a hot, trodden plain of clay, a brazen sky overhead, a town down below in the valley, and the French dead lying all round like faded tulips, cut and thrown down. A black figure managing the death pits, and a graceful girl, bending down and peering into every dead man's face.

"I found my sister at Fonde de Givonne," said Delaval, approaching George. "She is looking for some one whose death might be important to you. Aimé Hebert."

"But you said he could pay me," said George, astonished.

"My dear sir, I required your assistance in getting on, and I forget what I told you. If any part of it was true, I must have been a great fool. My object was to deceive you. Do me the compliment to say that I succeeded, or I shall be extremely angry with you."

George felt extremely inclined to kick the man, but it was not a place for any demonstration of the kind. He said, "I never before knew a Frenchman tell such falsehoods as you have done, sir."

"But, my dear sir, I am not a Frenchman," said Delaval.

"Your sister, who is approaching us, can possibly speak the truth, sir."

"But she is not my sister," said Delaval.

She came towards them and raised her veil. In one instant the great passage in George Dickson's life was over. Amidst the horrible ruin and desolation he saw the only woman he had ever cared for; the woman he had so seldom seen in his life, but so many thousand times in his dreams.

Miss Milton, of Milfield Lane. No other person in the world. He had met her twice at parties in Highgate, and about there, and had fallen in love with her. He had also dared to walk with her in Milfield Lane, but she had been cold, almost rude to him. He had tried to forget her, but it had been useless. For the last time, as he believed, he had met her in Milfield Lane, and laid his love before her.

She told him the plain truth. All her people were French except her father, whose name she bore. She was fiancée to Aimé Hebert, and could not listen to him. He then committed an awful act of folly; he made the acquaintance of that young Frenchman, so that he might see her sometimes, even when another's arm was round her waist.

There are few who possess the powers of concentration which Heine had, who can give us a tragedy in a sonnet. We will, however, be as brief as we can. He followed Aimé Hebert about, and at last went security for him; a debt which Hebert neglected to pay, and which for a time nearly ruined George.

Who can tell what madness has been committed by men and women when they have seen the object of their love in another's possession? George habitually saw the only woman he loved receiving attentions from another man, for whom she did not seem to care very much. In the end it made him almost careless of his life.

He would not be rich before his father's death. His father was penurious and mean, keeping him poor, and telling him that he must make his own way in life. That does no man any harm if he can be got to believe it; and if George's father had stopped there all would have been well. But the old man thought that it would be a fine thing for George to

marry well. He proposed a match to him with a rich young lady, older than himself. She was very good, and he in a state of infuriated disappointment. George told her the lie that he loved her; he knew it to be a lie, but he told it. She believed him, and was greatly gratified. In the meantime, her father decided that they must wait for three years, and that he must make his way in the world.

So he went to the bar, and so naturally he went to literature; so he naturally came to the field of Sedan, that Aceldama of so many hopes; and so on that field he met his old, his only love, only to find that the chain of honour dragged him away from her for ever.

Would he not have changed places with the dead when she told him the truth; when she looked into his eyes with hers, and said softly, "This is a strange place to meet you, and this is a strange place for you to find me in. I was in the town the whole of the horrible day. The German soldiers were very kind to us, but the town was so horrible that I came out, and crept into a house at Fonde de Givonne. I have come across the field where the 17th de la Ligne perished, because I wanted to see if I could recognize the body of one of my cousins."

"Your news is good," said George. "You looked coolly for the body of your lover."

"I do not understand you," she said. "You are as rude to me as I used to be to you; but in this ruin we must forget all. My nerve is good, because after the breach between myself and Aimé Hebert, who so grossly deceived you, I have entered a nursing sisterhood, and have become used to death in all forms. I have taken my first vows, and I shall take the veil in three months. My father sent Mr. Delaval after me; but I think among these kindly Germans I could have done without his assistance."

"Mr. Delaval said he was your brother."

"Mr. Delaval my brother!" she said. "Mr. Delaval is a Pole. I believe known to most police-courts in Europe. He is a splendid spy, and my father employed him, but could get him no papers; he is too well known. Are you married yet?"

"No, not yet."

"It is delicious to meet you here, after all. Look round at these poor innocent young men, lying so quiet: in the presence of death one seems to be always with God. We loved one another once: now your heart has gone to another human being, and mine is given to Heaven."

There are terrible moments in each man's or woman's life which will not bear repeating. What either of these two people would ever have said to one another can never be known now.

They stood looking at one another. Their interview had been short, but they had found out something in it: they had found that they cared for one another. Still, the man had cast away his life on the altar

of avarice, and the woman, as women will, had dedicated hers to religion.

Together, mutually helping one another, what might they be yet? What might their children be yet? They stood face to face, close to one another, knowing that it was their last interview. The laws of honour and of the world would take him from her; the laws of religion would take her from him. Around were the happy dead, with their feet turned up to the sky.

A loud sound of talking disturbed them. They retired into themselves. The Bengal officer came up and said: "One of these abominations of percussion shells is lying here unexploded. Come up, Dickson, and look at it."

She took his arm and went with him. One gentle pressure told him the truth. She loved nim still.

Delaval, the Pole, had the shell in his hand. It was about nine inches long, and pointed. The German laboratory is not so good as the English; we are more clever in details. A comparatively large number of the German shells never burst, when fired at a low trajectory. A husbandman, while ploughing on the heights above Paris, long after the siege, was killed, with both his horses, by turning up one of them. Near where they stood were four young men lying with their heads together by the explosion of one of them, and, in all probability, five others, lying close by, were killed by the same shell. We only wish our readers to understand that these shells are terribly dangerous things, and that their time of explosion is by no means so ascertainable as could always be wished.

Delaval had the shell in his hand. As they advanced he was discoursing about it, and holding it aloft. "The percussion fuse in this one is gone wrong," he said. "See, I will throw it down among us, and you shall see that it will not explode."

Before anyone could stop the madman, he had done it. There was a great blue flame, and a sound totally different from the report of a cannon. A shattering, broken noise, then smoke, and an instant's silence. The Carabineer officer, the Bengal officer, the "Indépendence Belge," and Miss Milton were all unwounded. Delaval was prostrate, horribly injured about the head, and George Dickson had his left arm torn away, and was crying out for water.

There was a burying party near, across the road, composed mainly of the citizens of the town, who seemed to prefer this dreadful occupation to watching the ruins of their own homes. They came and helped the two wounded men; but a London doctor who was there said that there was no hope for either of them.

They carried them into Givonne, and laid them in a barn, in the straw, side by side. A Turco had to be moved to make room for them, and he cursed them by Allah, at first; but when the young lady, whom

we shall in future take the liberty of calling Elizabeth, gave him some water, he blessed as strongly as he had cursed.

The English doctor attended to George, and he tried to sleep; but the man on the left of him was restless, and, in trying to soothe him, he found that it was Delaval, groaning heavily.

"Why, are you hurt too?" said George. "I am so very sorry for that. What a fool you were to play with that shell."

"I did it on purpose," said Delaval. "I saw that she cared for you still. I wished to destroy you. Are *you* badly hurt?"

"I am a miserable cripple for life," said George. "But God knows that I forgive you. Why did you do it?"

"I tell you that I saw she cared for you. I love her, and she hates me. I wanted to kill you and her too. Is she dead?"

"No, she was not injured," said George.

"I wish she was. But now that you are utterly ruined it does not so much matter. One comfort is that she will never look at you now."

"I wish that I had never set eyes on you," said George. "I think that I should have killed you, had I known the truth about you. I will not curse you, I am in need of mercy myself. I will heap my bitterest revenge on you. I entirely forgive you. There must have been something noble in your nature once, or you never could have wooed such a woman. But what have I done to God that he should have thrown us two together?"

We always know so much better than divine Providence. May not the war cause the creation of a new and more noble France? Bull's Run saved the United States, as the English victory of Bunker's Hill made them.

Delaval died that night, but George was delirious, and did not know it. His head was confused for a long time, and he came to himself very slowly. The first person he knew was his father; he fancied that he must be in London, because his father never went out of London on any pretence whatever, and his father, as he thought, would never take the trouble to come ten miles to see him; though he might spend a hundred pounds in sending him a doctor, and scold him violently for the expense afterwards. When he saw his father at his bedstead he concluded that he must be in London.

But only at first: these walls were not London walls, so bright and so clean: and those leaves tapping at the window were vine leaves, which certainly grow in London, but in a most dingy state. The first information that his father gave him was that he was still at Givonne, and that Paris was besieged.

There was an intense tenderness in his father's manner, which he had never noticed before. He made a guess at the reason of this when his mind fully returned to him. He knew that he had lost his left arm.

"And my father," he argued, "thinks that I have forgotten it in my delirium, and hesitates to tell me of it."

The next time that the immovable old face came near his, he threw his remaining arm round the old man's neck and said, "If I had two arms, father, I would put them both round your neck. Forgive your poor cripple for any sorrow he has caused you."

"My own boy, you have caused me no sorrow. I am going to cause you some. Are you strong enough to bear it?"

"Is Elizabeth dead?"

"Your faithful nurse! God forbid that such a thing should happen. She is close by. But the match between you and Ada is broken off. She has behaved more heartlessly than I could have conceived. She has refused, do you understand, to marry you after your accident. It is all over, my poor boy."

"Thank God," said George.

"Are you glad, then?" said his father.

"I don't know yet. Did you say that Elizabeth was here? Send her to me. And, dear father, go away."

When the father came back, a beautiful woman had thrown off her wimple, and had disclosed the magnificent radiance of her hair, which one month afterwards would have been cut away. She said, "I am going to marry your crippled son, sir. I will be a good daughter to you. Try to be a good father to me."

So they then took hands and went down the stream of time together, and never separated in thought, mind, or deed.

And if it had not been for the murderous scoundrel Delaval, trying to kill two of them and himself with the shell on the field, they would never have come together at all. She would have been a good woman wherever she went, but carrying a sore in her heart never to be healed. He would have been a useless man, with a wife whose presence he disliked. They have been both saved from those fates; she is none the less religious, though a dignified mother of a family.

He with her encouragement has made a mark in the world, and his old father says, "No man of this day, sir, has a finer son than I have."

But the old man of an evening got them to tell him over and over again about the poor young men who lay there so thick at Sedan. And he says, "If it had not been for that battle, and for the man Delaval, you two would never have come together. Depend upon it that Providence is right in the end."

We are very much inclined to agree with him.

FRONI.

An Alpine Story.

I.

WHEN the red glowing fire-ball, having completed its daily circle around the dark forest, sinks behind yonder hills, the "Waldbauer" throws away hatchet and saw, and turns his face homewards. The woodpecker also suspends his destructive activity, and the wood is left in peace. That is the rule on three hundred and sixty-four days in the year which does not extend to a three hundred and sixty-sixth.

On a certain day is held the Kirchtag, or Church Festival, in the Alpine village; the anniversary of the consecration of the church—a great holiday, kept by grand morning and afternoon services, followed by dancing and boundless gaieties, lasting all night long. It is a great day for all. No one will be found missing on such an occasion; the sick and the old will creep up to the place of assembly—the large stately inn, standing high up on the mountain, in the midst of the dark wood, nearly on a level with the church which crowns the height, whose gilded steeple-tops in forms of Greek crosses shine far out over the land. It is of this day we now write.

The moonless night was lighted up by rockets, flying high up into the air, bursting and shedding down millions of sparks, as if threatening to set the wood on fire; duly admired by those idly watching their flight, or by others who happen to look up at them in the midst of other amusements. Gunshots, the klingklang of musical instruments, shouts and laughter of human throats rang through the night-air.

"Hollah ho!—Juchhée!" Down the foot-path through the wood came a gay party, consisting of about a dozen boys armed with blazing torches, Boldl at their head, preceded by musicians, piping merrily. They must needs "play Boldl home," and there had been a struggle who should be of the party when Boldl first intimated a wish to go home—not going home to bed exactly, you know, but just under pretence of doing so, to roam about on his way in pursuit of some new sort of fun; the old stock being quite exhausted.

Boldl (Leopold), "Wild Boldl," as they called him, had been very gay on that day. The first upon the dancing-ground he had occupied his terrain as sole ruler to the end; he, king of the gaieties, had held sway over those who looked for nothing better than being amused.

They willingly bent under his sceptre, knowing that wherever Boldl was the leader, there was wonderful fun lurking in all corners.

Wild Boldl! the Wiesenhofbauern's only son: the richest heir in the neighbourhood—who knew him not? His fame had spread far

beyond the boundaries of his native village. Wherever any mischief was done, or trick played, Boldl was the instigator of all, as sure as sure could be; Boldl, and Boldl again, at the bottom of all. As yet he had never done any real harm; fun was his object in all—but who knew how far and whither his waywardness might lead him?

His father, whose equanimity was often disturbed by complaints from others and his own apprehensions, quieted his mind by the thought:

"Hannerl (Johanna) will teach him better; let him marry, and then see how steady he will become! Wasn't I a bit wild too, and then settled into married life quite easily. They shall be married as soon as possible. In the meantime let him enjoy the remainder of his freedom."

And Boldl *did* enjoy his free life; the nearer the wedding-day, the wilder his ways, as if to spite those talking of his steadiness to come.

"Juchhée! I am the Wiesenhof-Boldl, Juchhée! As far as I see around, the world is mine—am I a mole not to enjoy it? Juchhée!"

So far as to Boldl's morals. Concerning his appearance—well, just have a look at him. Look at the tall, straight, slender figure, with its quick and graceful movements, the regular-featured, open, sunburnt face, ornamented by a black rich moustache with lightly curled ends; by a pair of smiling lips and pearl white teeth; short, but curly, raven hair—look into the soft, good-humoured, sparkling dark eyes—and tell me you don't like that creature, if you dare. No, you love Wild Boldl in spite of his reputation, in spite of yourself; and you would be but too eager to find an excuse should any mischief transpire; you could not even duly resent a trick practised upon your own self.

Such is Boldl.

And Hannerl?

Hannerl is a pretty, round-faced, sweet tempered girl, who likes Boldl exceedingly well. Had she not been betrothed to him from earliest childhood she might have fallen in love with him—but there is nothing like those premature arrangements of the parents to prevent any warmer feeling from springing up in a young heart.

Hannerl was daughter of the mayor, who was innkeeper at the same time. The stately inn, and many a substantial building, wide fields and wood, cattle, and a good piece of money, were his own. Hannerl was an only child, like Boldl. Another coincidence: she was the richest heiress, as Boldl was the richest heir. Their grounds lay next to each other, the frontier between the two estates was not even marked by a stile; nothing but small white stones placed at pretty considerable distances from each other, like mile-stones on the road, indicated the boundaries. When Boldl and Hannerl joined hands in church, those stones need only be removed, and the two estates, wedded to each other,

would become one. Even their respective ages were suitable: Boldl was twenty-three, Hannerl nineteen years of age.

Hannerl knew all the advantages of her position in life. She was above being jealous, she could quietly look on when Boldl danced with other girls. "Let him flirt with these little geese," her lofty thoughts ran; "I shall have him quite for my own soon: mine he is, mine alone!"

The night was far spent when the fellows sallied forth from the inn in search of adventures.

"Juch—Juchhée!"

"Juchhée, hée, hée!" resounded from hill to hill until the sound died away in the farthest distance.

"Boldl! Boldl—Boldl—Boldl—oldl! Wild Boldl!"

"Boldl—Boldl—Boldl"—repeated the fond nymph Echo innumerable times. And peals of laughter, and shouts following, were thrown back from all sides, like mockery of thousands of fairy-like beings inhabiting those woods and hills around.

Suddenly one of the party cried, "Beware!" and all stood still at the commanding word.

Before their feet the ground fell rapidly; they stood above a precipice not practicable for their unsteady feet. A flight of steps just broad enough to offer safe passage to one person, leading down, landed at the door of a little hut of very modest appearance: a hut standing close to the wild brook which, at times swelled into a mighty, high-flowing river, serves to carry the timber cut on the height down into the valley, ready for further transportation. The back of the hut was close to the rock, half cut into the ground, looking as if growing out of it—mushroom-like; the front turned to the river, only a narrow passage between protected by a low fence, ornamented with various pieces of household implements, and some flower-pots around the door and windows. The thatched roof was kept down by large white stones, placed in regular rows upon it, lest the wind should carry off the roof and part of the hut together.

The boys inquisitively lowered their torches and exposed the poor dwelling to view. Lighted up by the unsteady flaring glow it looked not much of a habitation for human beings; rather a hovel than a house.

Boldl's clouded mind was singularly impressed by the sight of those white stones on the roof.

"There is another to keep you company, lest the breeze should blow away my little cottage!" With this, having taken up a large piece of stone from the ground, lifting it high above his head, he with all his might flung it down upon the unhappy roof.

A thundering clap, a cracking, a loud heart-rending shriek of a woman's voice, and the crying of an infant, were the answers to Boldl's misplaced merriment. The stone had fallen through, and evidently

hurt, perhaps killed, a human being. The boys stood aghast; their intoxication wore away, their dim brains began to clear.

Another minute and the door of the hut was flung open, the glaring of a burning piece of pine-wood broke out through it; then followed the appearance of a young woman, one arm holding up the firebrand high above her head, the other pressing a sobbing infant to her motherly breast. The face of the child was overflowing with blood.

As she stood there, in her picturesque undress of printed blue cotton; her tall, slender, yet fully developed form, the pale face framed into a profusion of golden hair streaming down in shining waves far below her knees, her large blue eyes raised with an expression of woful indignation, the infant on her breast; she presented a splendid picture of holy maternity.

The rioters, thunderstruck, stood fastened to the ground: Boldl had never before seen or noticed the young woman; now he stood gazing at her as if he could never tear his eyes from this heavenly apparition; for his life he could not have moved or proffered a word. Sobered by the accident he had quickly recovered his senses as the thought flashed through his brain:

"Thou hast hurt, thou might'st have killed, a human being—an innocent, helpless child!"

The woman raised the firebrand high above her head in order to recognize her aggressors, whose loud mirth had reached her ear through the still night air, whilst she was sitting at her infant's cradle, diligently spinning to earn another day's living for her darling and herself; little fancying in what a terrible way the calmness of her mind would be disturbed.

"I cannot distinguish," she said after a while, with the tremor of violent agitation in the rich tones of her ringing voice; "but without seeing, I know thee, Wild Boldl!"

And with haughty indignation she stepped back, retiring into the cottage and bolted her door.

Darkness and deep stillness, the latter only interrupted from time to time by sobbing sounds from the infant's breast, was reigning again below.

The party slowly moved on; they tried a few more jokes, but it wouldn't take with Boldl; he soon got out some florins, and distributing them amongst the musicians, he said "good night" and went home.

The hut in the wood was that of the "Flösser," whose business it was to watch over the wild waters, and by means of primitive art to regulate their flow to the requirements of the "Waldbauer;" the sluice and weir, the water gates, the dikes and dams, were under the management of that official. But the Bach-Törge had been dead since last spring, when most unfortunately falling down a considerable height,

the decrepid old man, unable to keep up the struggle long, was washed away by his familiar waters.

Froni (Veronica) his young widow, with her orphan baby, lived in the hut now.

II.

Next day bore the reflex of the previous night. The setting sun leaves its glorious red glow behind to fade away slowly on the sky; the "Kirchtag" leaves the "Nachkirchtag" to the same effect upon the earth. Where, as in our village, the yearly fair is joined to the Kirchtag, the sale, beginning on Sunday afternoon with sweetmeats, cakes, and other dainties useful for the purposes of the Kirchtag, is carried on the next day on a larger scale. The poor and dependent who cannot afford to spend another day in idle merriment, retire home after marketing. The well-to-do people are so favoured as to drain the cup of joy to the dregs. There is a smaller and select party meeting in the inn, on the dancing-places in the room, and outside on the green turf, on Monday afternoon. Dancing had begun long ago, and Boldl was still missing from the ground.

Hannerl went up and down, pouting her pretty lips, now and then dancing with some boy; then again, under pretence of superintending the servants, retiring into the house, hoping at each new exit to encounter Boldl's joyous greeting. Boldl had been seen walking upwards on the way to the inn. A freshly-cut stick lay over his shoulder, a bundle dangling from it—a well-stocked bundle, tied up in a newly-bought red silk kerchief—just the bundle boys are usually seen to carry to their sweethearts, containing sweets, cakes, ribbons, and other acceptable things from the market.

Boys and girls, merrily walking hand in hand, accosted him. "La! what a bundle for Hannerl!"—"Give me a honey cake, thy sweetheart won't miss it."—"Well, thou givest us nothing? What a miser!" No joke or taunt could rouse Boldl's usual spirits. Any other day he would have punished a girl's saucy remark with a kiss, or rewarded a flattery with a sweetmeat. But to-day he nodded simply and replied not. A shower of merry words were wasted after him as he silently walked on.

Higher up, where two roads and a footpath meet, he stopped, and first cautiously looked round whether any one could see him. Then suddenly, as if ashamed of his caution, he stamped the ground with his foot, muttering between his teeth: "The d——l! I am not a fool! Have I not a right to go wherever I please, and on my own grounds too?" And swiftly swinging himself round, he with brisk, elastic, firm steps went down the footpath, in the opposite direction to the inn and Hannerl.

Boldl stood at Froni's door. Afraid lest she, seeing him, should bolt

the door against his face, energetically clasping the latch, he pushed the door wide open.

"Grüss Gott!" (God greet thee!) he called out to Froni.

Froni was sitting as usual turned away from the door, at her spinning wheel beside the cradle. She recognized Boldl's voice instantly—had she not often heard those rich manly tones ringing through the wood? Slowly rising from her seat she turned round, and her clear blue eyes fell full upon the intruder, sweeping up and down his tall figure. He felt a chill from top to toe, then suddenly fire rushing through his veins.

"Gott gruss Dich!" Boldl repeated, with a tremulous voice; and he advanced some steps, stretching out his hand to her.

Froni took it not, but quietly kept looking at him as if searching in his face for the motive which might possibly have brought him hither. But when he came up close to her she bent down, and lifting the slumbering baby out of its white cushions, she held it up towards Boldl. He looked down into the quiet, pale little face, with its calm blue eyes now opening, the bruised lump on its delicate white temple, and he felt—he never knew how and what. In the intensity of that undefined feeling, he with an imploring look stretched out his arms towards the child, and receiving it into them, he sank down on one knee, kissing and pressing it to his throbbing heart. He could never part with it: and when at last he looked up from the child to the mother, she saw his handsome dark eyes overflowing with tears.

A vivid colour rushed to Froni's pale face, her eyes dilated, brightened; and the glistening tears bedewed the glowing cheek, which gradually turned to deadly paleness again.

Oh! she was strangely beautiful, that woman, standing before Boldl in her simple cotton gown—before Boldl, the rich Wiesenhofbeauer's Boldl! He gazed at her with rapturous admiration, watching those lovely blushes come and go alternately on her pure, delicate face, until he more felt than saw her shrinking beneath his intense gaze. He rose quickly, putting the baby with careful tenderness into its cradle; then, to hide his embarrassment, moved to the table and began with a trembling hand unfolding the bundle's contents.

"Look here, Froni," he said, without raising his eyes; "here are sweets for Jörg (George) and—and for thee: and here is a nosegay and ribbons for thee?"

"Flowers and ribbons for me?" said Froni, with calm, genuine wondering. "Give that to Hannerl."

Boldl stood embarrassed, not finding the right word to say.

"I do not want anything," Froni continued; "I thank God for having escaped the hardship so far."

"Froni!" cried Boldl, "do not be hard upon me!" And once more he stretched out his hand.

"I do not want to be," she said; her voice softened. And dropping

her eyes she added: "Look here, people missing you on the dancing ground will see you coming out of my hut, and there will be more talk about it than will do us good. It is getting dusk, get thee away, please."

"Who has a right to talk about us, and what do I care for people's gossip!" he fired up, gradually getting himself again.

"*Thou* dost not care, of course: it cannot harm *thee*—but me?" said Froni, indignantly.

"They shall not hurt thee," cried he; "and if I choose to remain here, no one shall prevent me."

"And I?" said Froni, in the same tone.

"Thou wilt not drive me from thee: thou dost not hate me, dost thou?"

Froni remained silent.

"Look here: if I woo thee,—if I offer thee my hand, my whole self, and lands, and forest, and herds, and houses, and all my money,—thou wilt say a kind word to me? Froni, one little word! Do say thou likest me a little!"

Froni looked up to him with a glance of deepest earnestness. "I am but a poor woman," said she, "who must earn her living and that of her orphan baby by hard handy-work, but I am free to like anyone or not. Boldl, I *cannot* like thee, thy ways are too wild."

"That to me! to the Wiesenhof Boldl!" he exclaimed, overpowered by rage; now quite himself again; quite wild Boldl.

"That to thee!" said Froni, firmly, "to thee, the rich Wiesenhofbauern's son. And if the Wiesenhofbauer himself stood here before me, and asked me to marry his son, I would say No!"

Boldl stood petrified: he could not find another word for his emotion but the expressive "Sapperment!!!"

"There, that is thyself again!" said Froni, sadly. "Adieu; greet Hannerl from me."

Boldl struggled for his breath. "Froni?" he gasped.

Froni held her peace.

"Froni, come to the dancing-place; I will dance with thee alone, in sight of all the village; thou shalt see I am in earnest."

Froni smiled faintly; she pointed to the baby in the cradle: "Here is *my* place; *thine* is at Hannerl's side. Go, and give thy presents to her."

In the same moment a loud, shrill voice, singing out a merry "Jodler" was heard in the neighbourhood.

"God keep thee, and Hannerl!" said Froni, and pointed with a commanding gesture to the bundle and then to the door.

Boldl precipitated himself upon that outstretched hand, and wrung it violently; then hastily gathering up the bundle, he threw it into the cradle, at the infant's feet, to prevent another refusal. Storming out of

the hut, he passed the astonished Tobi, who wonderingly looked after him, and disappeared behind the thick trees.

Tobi (Tobias) was Flösser for the time being, but a bachelor; the old man did not take up more room in the house than that of a bed in the back kitchen, and a stone seat before the door outside. Froni and her baby, by a mutual understanding, were allowed the use of the house as before, without paying rent, of course. Tobi was godfather to George, and was felt to be a protection to the child's mother. Seeing Boldl at the hut that evening, he apprehended mischief, and from that time kept more at home than he had been wont to.

III.

From that time Boldl haunted that part of the wood where the hut stood. He never came right close to the house, but he would roam around it in a narrow circle, pouring out his heart's emotion in song; or he would stand leaning over the railing above the hut, at the top of the steps, for hours; silently and patiently waiting for Veronica's appearance, watching her coming and going at her household work. All else seemed to have slipped from his memory: there were no family ties, no other bonds, affections, or attractions existing for him. For Boldl the wide world contained but a little, miserable, thatch-roofed cottage on the wild brook side, in it a young, fair-haired woman with her baby—all the rest was desert—a void.

Mingling with the mysterious rustling of the foliage, the soft, soothing murmuring of the fast falling waters, Froni's sensitive ear caught the deep, wild tones of a passionate love, now warbling in exulting joyfulness, now in playful merriment, then suddenly falling to woe-begone misery, to notes of despair—tones which met a ready echo in the vibration of her young sorrowful heart. The passionate appeal awakened corresponding feelings, which, however, she tried to stifle, never allowing her thoughts to dwell on them. Veronica had not known much of love in her poor life. She scarcely had known herself anything but an orphan or a widow: the short span of her married life had not stirred up any slumbering fonder feelings while it lasted—had not left in her memory either satisfaction, or more than the usual regret at the loss of a true old friend. And now love—a blessing to others—came to her as an evil; some shapeless but dreadful danger which struck her with terror.

By the summer heat most of her household work was done out of doors: could she have said herself whether she did not fetch water oftener than was absolutely necessary? or whether spinning wheel and baby's cradle had not on some evenings been better indoors? Tobi, morose and fidgety, sat before the house; he had ears as well as Froni, and gladly would he have answered Boldl's singing by snatches of biting sarcasm, had he not been afraid of Wild Boldl doing something dreadful in

revenge; or the Wiesenhofbauer getting angry and sending him away from his post, making Froni homeless.

Froni never raised her eyes when she felt Boldl's presence; but his standing above her at the stile, his burning look, followed her about.

One day Froni was occupied in drying her baby's clothes which she had been washing snow-white in the brook. Turned to the water, and intent on her work, she had not looked up or around for a long while. Happening to turn round for some implement, she beheld the shadow of a man thrown by the rays of the sinking sun on the white-washed wall of her hut. That was not Boldl's shadow; it was a much bigger and apparently older man, although there was a great semblance in outline and attitude. Froni instinctively felt it must be the Wiesenhofbauer himself. Her heart, terror-stricken, stood still. Recovering her breath after some minutes, she hastened in as if guilty of some fraud, and caught in the act. Safe behind her bolted door she found relief in a passionate burst of tears. From this time she did not trust herself so much out of doors.

But the Wiesenhofbauer moved away, thoughtfully shaking his head. People had not exaggerated; that *was* a dangerous woman, quite fit to come between a man and his quiet happiness; yet mingling with his feelings of resentment were those of admiration of the fair woman and pity with the poor widow and her orphan baby. Boldl's idleness was in a great measure the cause of this new evil; that the father understood; a radical cure for mental disease was hard bodily work, and accordingly, Boldl was sent up the heights to superintend the cutting of the trees, an office which the father filled himself many another year.

Boldl was up on the mountains all day, superintending the work, and heartily joining in the same; his strong arms and firm hands managed the ponderous hatchet, the hard grinding-saw, the lighter bill-hook, with the same skill and understanding as any other hardy labourer trained to the work from childhood upwards. Coming home at night, he looked over-tired and exhausted, wanting rest as badly as anyone might after a long day's hard labour, and a walk of some hours home. But supper and prayers being over and everybody in the house fast asleep, Boldl tossed about on his bed feverishly; there was no rest for him; no other help but getting up again and noiselessly stealing out at the back door, leading into the wood. He must satisfy himself whether Froni's lamp was still alight. Cloaked with the deep shadows of night, he ventured to creep up close to the hut, trying to get a peep through the open window. Sometimes a light breeze would favour his wishes, by lightly moving the curtain and unveiling the picture within: a poor widowed mother working half the night for the maintenance of her orphan child; or if the curtain kept down obstinately, he would, under cover of the soft noise of the spinning wheel, and emboldened by Froni's

abstraction, stretch out a trembling hand and just lift up a corner of it. Froni usually sat with her back to the window. Her golden hair, not pinned up or covered by a kerchief like other women's, but flowing down in waves covering her like a royal mantle; just a line of her delicate profile, or the faintest glimpse of a pale cheek, was all he could see. And when she moved at last, shaking back her glossy hair with utter weariness, putting aside spinning-wheel, approaching the window in order to draw the shutter in, he flew back, hiding behind the bushy hedge, waiting with a beating heart for her full appearance. Whether lighted by her dim lamp or the full moon, there was always a look of weariness in her face, when she raised her eyes, sending a glance of entreaty up to heaven, contrasting so much with that of haughty resignation she wore in the day-time. The shutter fell in with a click, and the fair vision was gone. Boldl would press his hand to his wildly throbbing, grief-burning breast, and brushing away with his shirt-sleeve the hot tears of despair overflowing his manly face, would draw up his tall figure and move homewards, throwing many a yearning look back into the deep shadows covering the hut. It was dawn-break when he reached his attic, and the first crow of the house-cock called the Waldbauern out to work.

And Froni no longer seeing or hearing Boldl; never guessing his nightly revels; thought herself forgotten and given up like many another of the wild boy's fancies!

Boldl looked daily more ill and spiritless, and his father's anxiety grew in the same measure. "Boldl, my boy!" he said one morning at parting, "I know what ails thee; thou wantest to get out of this unsettled state; it is time for thee to be married. And Hannerl has been ready ever so long—shall we tell her father that we are ready too? When the timber is safely marketed in town you two may be married. Wilt thou fix the day, my boy?" But the boy, with a marble face, turned, and shouldering his hatchet silently walked away.

Ah! the father might well shake his head in perplexity!

The same day a quarrel arose between Boldl and the Flosser Tobi. The latter had seized every opportunity to vex the hated boy, and Boldl had borne it patiently for Froni's sake. But to-day he was exasperated by his father's talk. Meeting Tobi on the height at work, he asked boldly whether Froni would bring his dinner up as she had done once before, and Tobi forbade him to inquire after Froni, or to watch for her, or to dare to approach her anyhow: with what right Boldl could not understand. Violent words were thrown in each other's face. The peasants around drew near; most of them kept to Boldl. But when he declared that no one had a right to interfere, as he, Boldl, was in earnest, and would marry Froni any day, if but she chose to take him they all laughed.

"Wild Boldl marrying a penniless widow with a baby—taking charge

of a beggar-child! Go, clown, that thou art! I know and I tell thee what thou wantest—to make her more miserable than she already is—wretch!"

Boldl rushed at Tobi, the offender, seizing at his throat—a struggle between the old and the young man must soon turn to Boldl's advantage; yet nobody interfered, feeling with Boldl's vexation. Down went Tobi on the ground. At the same moment a voice was heard. "Froni, Froni!" There she stood, white and trembling, the baby on her arm. Boldl on seeing her left the man, and precipitating himself towards Froni he passionately threw his arms round her and the child, solemnly exclaiming:

"Here I swear before God and these men as witnesses, that I will marry thee, if thou wilt accept my hand and all I possess. Thou shalt be my honoured wife; thy child my own son!"

He caught the baby in his arms, which was nearly escaping from Froni's shaking hands. She stepped back: and leaning her arm against the stem of a tree and her head upon the arm, wept passionately.

IV.

THERE were meetings of a very serious character in the large room of the inn which served also as town-hall on occasions, such as times of great danger, or unusual solemnities. The elder of the village, the "Förster," two magistrates of the neighbouring town, met to discuss a most important question—the future fate of the greatest peasant in the country, of Wiesenhofbauer's only son and heir. Any man in the village having the slightest right or fancying to have a right to put in a word, would put in his nose at the door of the assembly-room, in order to have a finger in the pie. The mayor presided with haughty dignity. "If it were not for the estates," he said, "Boldl might go to Froni if he choose, or to the deuce, for aught he cared: a girl like Hannerl had but to stretch out both her hands to have a suitor hanging on each of her ten fingers. Hannerl herself had cried a good deal on hearing of the scandal; but after a while her spirits rose, and throwing her pretty little nose up into the air, she said, "Bah! there are other boys enough! and if Boldl does not himself give up every thought of Froni, I won't look at him again, let father say what he likes."

The worthy assembly of notables had decided unanimously from the very first upon sending Veronica away to her distant home. The means by which this sentence might best be executed were discussed a long time. At length the final resolution was taken.

A new Flösser, a strong young man, was to be appointed; Tobi was to go working in the forest as before. The hut was to be put in repair at once, to be ready for the new inhabitant. So, of course, Froni

was homeless, and there was no other room for her to be got in the village; no dwelling, however poor, was to open its door to the widow and orphan. The magistrates would advise her to go home to her native village; she was proud, would take the hint and go.

The Wiesenhofbauer would pay her journey: would not the mayor do a trifle for her maintenance? but Hannerl's father proudly exclaimed: "No!" So far all right, but the world at large would call it a hard measure to send a widow and an orphan away; just before winter, too. It was always hard work for her to get her own living and the child's. It would be a grand thing to care for the baby who was born in the parish, and was in some sense belonging to it. Keep the child and let the mother go. But would the mother part with the child? Froni surely would not—poor mothers are always unreasonably fond of their children. But one might make her give up the baby. It was pretty sure that she could not produce a certificate of her marriage; in that case she might be treated as a girl whose baby did not so much belong to her as to the community in which it was born—she would be sure then to go home to get her papers. That would last months, and then she would perhaps have learned to see that she could get on much better by herself; that the baby had better remain where it was being taken care of. Or should she come back, Boldl and Hannerl would be married by that time: she would not care to meet the young couple, and all would end quietly.

The plan was to be executed whilst Boldl was at the large sale of timber in town. On his return he would be told that Froni, finding it too hard to earn her living, had gone home leaving her child upon the parish. Where her native village lay—*no one knew.*

Of course in after years Boldl and Froni would thank the magistrates for their kind interference—it was altogether a good, Christian work.

The Wiesenhofbauer smiled with satisfaction, as his son in his handsome Sunday suit jumped into the new cart, painted red and blue. Hans cracked his whip, the pair of prancing bays darted off, and Boldl was gone to town for a week or so. His father resolved not to lose time;—but he had made his reckoning without Hans, the head servant man of his farm, who, like all the rest of the household, was devoted to Boldl.

Hans set out on the journey with a heavy heart; he had an inkling of something going wrong, without as yet having got to the bottom of the affair.

Boldl made his progress to town with a gay heart. It was true though, that Froni kept sending him back to Hannerl whenever he found occasion to go near her with declarations of his warm love. But yesterday, at parting, she had not as usual refused shaking hands, and whilst her hand was trembling in his, her bright eyes shone with true love: it was but a moment, but Boldl was happy. He would woo in

patience and endurance, being now sure of the end. Wild Boldl had become wonderfully meek and patient!

In one place near town they stopped to refresh themselves and the horses. Hans entered into conversation with the stable-boy; the latter had seen two magistrates, accompanied by two armed officials, drive from town into the country, and he had caught some of the talk about their day's work. Seated again on the box, he turned round and imparted to his young master what he had learned.

"Turn the horses' heads back homewards!" shouted Boldl, jumping up from his seat. "I will take the responsibility." They took another way home to avoid attention, and Boldl alighted at the forest. What became of the large sale of timber in town without him we are unable to record.

Froni's hut presented a sad sight. It was empty, the few pieces of furniture lying outside. There lay the spinning-wheel and the empty cradle turned over! Boldl with a shout of distress rushed forward and nearly killed the man who was engaged in repairing the tumble-down place. The man, frightened to death, told him all that had happened.

"And she has gone, really gone?"

"How could she help it, poor thing, with the magistrates upon her?"

"And left the baby? how could she!"

"How could she? when they had got it, and two armed men between her and the child?"

"Can she really be gone!"

"She has gone, for I saw them accompany her down the high-road." Boldl gave himself up to a paroxysm of rage and despair.

"Ah, yes, poor thing!" sighed the mason, calmly taking to plastering the wall again.

With Boldl was a conviction that Froni was not gone; had not forsaken her baby. She was hiding in the wood; he would find her, and then they would fetch their baby. If his father had driven her out into the world, well—he had driven out his own son too!

After long hours of suspense, anxiety, and useless searching, Boldl wild with grief and exhaustion approached the mayor's house. He had information that the baby had been brought there for the present in want of another home for it. It was clear, bright moonlight, but no one was abroad; Boldl could approach the inn unseen. A watch-dog prepared to bark, but recognizing Boldl's familiar, caressing voice, he came near, wagging his bushy tail, and followed him on his errand. Boldl went round the large building, he passed the mayor's room and Hannerl's curtained window; he knew the child would not be there: he proceeded to the servants' part, giving a look in at each window, with a sharp ear to catch every sound. But all was still. At the farthest away from any

of the house-people's windows, there was one standing open, only covered with wire muslin to keep flies and other insects out. Boldl gave a hardy push, and his hand broke through the wire-blind. Entrance into the house was won. He thrust his hand farther in to remove the hooks, and wirework and frame came out at once. Floods of moonlight streamed into the dark room, and there in the middle of the room stood something huge which Boldl recognized as a finely-carved cradle. Here, indeed, lying in Hannerl's cradle, lay Froni's baby. They had put him out of the way, lest his crying should disturb their sleep. The child had been crying indeed for some hours, finding itself alone in a strange place; but at last it fell asleep, and now slept the good, sound slumber of childhood.

Boldl had but one idea: getting hold of the baby—his own baby, lest it should disappear like its mother. He introduced himself into the room by the window accompanied by the dog, knelt at the cradle, kissed the little face, took up the bundle of feather-beds containing his precious boy, and made out of the window in triumphant speed. He called the willing dog to follow him, lest they, noticing the fraud too soon, should send him on his track; and man, dog, and baby-bundle soon plunged into the thick forest, leaving no trace behind.

A few minutes after Boldl's withdrawal another form broke out of the wood, appearing on the lighted-up place before the inn. It drew near the house in the same cautious, stealthy way, and the same manœuvre began over again.

Boldl had been right; Froni was not quite gone. Seeing herself too weak to grapple with the authorities of the place, she resolved to go—not home into her own village—sending a letter to her old teacher and patron the priest, for the papers would do the work—but to go up to the emperor himself. Francis Joseph was in Styria, and many an instance of his benevolence and gracious clemency, his cordial behaviour to the country-folks, had become a current tale in the villages far about. Froni would journey night and day, she would throw herself at the emperor's feet; she knew right would be done to her, for she knew enough of the world to see that she had been dealt with most unlawfully.

But before she undertook the great task, before setting out on the long journey, she must see her child once more, kiss it, and then go.

Froni had found the open window and seen the cradle; Boldl had prepared the way—Froni was in the room. She knelt at the cradle praying to God for strength and patience, her tears fell hot: one look, one kiss, one blessing, and she must be gone again! Her head softly went down into the white cushions, and she gave a piercing shriek—the bed was empty—was her child dead, then!

She darted up, a piece of the baby's clothes lay on the floor near the window, another hung upon the shelf, a third outside on a bush.

Her baby had been stolen! She rushed to the door: it was fastened outside. Her knocks and shrieks brought some of the maids up, some men-servants followed, the door was opened. They took her for a mad-woman, not recognizing her at first—not able to collect the sense of her wild talk. The master himself appeared; he thought a whole band of thieves, robbers, murderers had broken in. He was the first to take in the state of things: the child was stolen, that was evident; and the robber must be run after. A wild hunt began whose utter confusion defies description. Every one ran in different directions, no one knowing where to direct his steps. The men shouted, the women shrieked, the dogs barked, the master swore, the neighbours came, joining the hunt, the whole village began to stir. And Froni foremost; her hair flying, her garments torn, her feet and arms bleeding, darting up and down, now joining one party, now another, now again flying by herself onwards, outstripping the others too slow for her anxiety.

Boldl would have had far the better of his pursuers had he not been hindered in speed: first, by the baby bundle he was afraid to introduce between the thorny bushes running right across homewards: secondly, by the dog's unwillingness to follow him. As soon as the latter heard the voices of his own people of the inn he wanted to run back to them, declining to hear and obey Boldl any longer. He had to keep him tight by the leather strap round his neck, dragging the beast along with him. So far all right still. He advanced slowly, but as yet was clear out of sight of his followers, when suddenly stumbling over some roots, losing his equilibrium, requiring both his hands to save his baby from a heavy fall, he for one moment involuntarily let the dog loose—and off darted the nasty beast! Now Boldl knew all was lost. But to be caught here in the wood, like a common thief and robber? No, by no means! and onwards again he toiled.

His pursuers, led by the dog, now could not fail to get at him. Boldl now stood between them and the wild rushing river. A thought flashed through his brain, followed by instant execution. He ran to the next weir he knew of; it was a convenient passage for him, and, to prevent those behind him from following, he, coming to the middle of it, drew out the huge iron nail, hastening to reach the end before the waters came down.

Froni now stood by the side of the brook, panting for breath, her bosom heaving; she had recognised Boldl, and knew with a thrilling happiness her baby was not stolen but saved. But scarcely had she been able to take in that bewildering truth than she must again tremble for the two beings she loved more than her life. The waters came on with a thundering noise; one more step and Boldl would be safe, when suddenly his foot slipping, he had but time to throw the baby away from him, landing it safely in the high grass; then gliding down he disappeared as by magic, the floods covering him

and washing him out of sight. A piercing shriek from Froni, echoed by all the bystanders, and the rushing of the waters. Then, many feet below, Boldl's form came up to the surface, faintly struggling with the floods. All stood helpless and hopeless. Not so Froni. He had tried to save her child! She ran down the slope, with a winged pace, overgaining the current. Having got a-head of the drowning man; having chosen the right place, where the waters flow on level ground for a few yards; she boldly threw herself down, with outstretched arms, receiving Boldl's nearly lifeless form as the waters carried him downwards. Surrounding his body with one arm she managed to raise his head and keep it over the waters, her other arm working against the stream. Good swimmer as Froni had been once in her home on the shore of the lake, formed by the wild waters rushing into it; here in the falling waters, forming cascade after cascade, with her load, swimming was out of the question; all she could do was to contrive to remain afloat on her back until those who saw her deed and now followed with speed should come to the rescue.

Help was greatly needed: they were approaching a great fall at greater height than they would have been able to stand. But before they came to it, the passage was barred with logs and branches; and many a villager's arms were employed to bring on shore the two who, having been next to united in death, should never again in this life be parted.

Froni lay in high fever in the Wiesenhof, in the master's own bed; she was tended and cared for with attention and anxiety. Boldl, who after a day or two was quite himself again, except that he felt a good deal knocked up, had run up to town for a couple of physicians. The village smith, who cured the rest of the world in the place, he thought not good enough for the present case. The learned doctors came: two very clever men, who, after a private conversation with Boldl, immediately understood the state of affairs. Whenever they spoke to Boldl their talk was gay and hopeful, but when they had to do with his father, encouraged by the son's twinkling and nodding, their faces grew grave and long, expressing fear and doubt. It was a sad case; not belonging to the run of daily occurences: a young, delicate woman dying for having saved a young man's life; for surely Boldl was so far gone, had not she contrived to keep his head above the flood, risking her own life, there had been an end of wild Boldl on earth. But there might be still hope for her recovery, if they could only gladden her heart in some way as soon as she regained her senses.

The Wiesenhofbauer went about his house grave and silent. His only son had been saved to him by Froni—just by her! And his only son was resolved on one thing: Froni dying, he would adopt her child and make him his heir: Froni living, she would become his wife. If his father would not consent—well, he would leave his home and go with his wife

and child to another place, earning their living, working as a labourer on some farm.

The father saw that, by his harsh and unlawful proceedings against Froni, he had severed his son's heart from his own, and he felt he must suffer from it. He was his only child; the father could not do without him. So there was no help but giving in, though with a sour face he spoke his consent. But his trials were not over: he had another lesson of humility yet to learn.

Froni was convalescent. Her baby was crawling on her bed; diving, as it were, in a sea of golden waves streaming down the red silk coverlet, his little fingers brushing through his mother's curly hair, all his movements accompanied by shrieks of delight. And now Boldl entered. He sat down at the side of the bed, where he had been watching through many a long anxious night. Boldl and Froni talked a long time; Boldl would not give way—but he found it hard to persuade Froni, until she saw that he was resolved.

"Dost thou remember," she said gravely, "what I said to thee once?—and if the Wiesenhofbauer himself came ——"

"And when the Wiesenhofbauer himself comes to ask thee to marry his son——Froni! Froni! what wilt thou say?" He waited in breathless suspense, and no answer coming, he repeated the question: "What wilt thou say?" His loving eye, his eager hand, waited for a reply.

Froni hid away her tearful face, and putting her hand in his, she sobbed, "God willed it so!"

And Froni was in Boldl's arms, firmly clasped to his faithful breast, her hair and eyes covered with his kisses, her lips softly whispering: "Oh, how I love thee!" The baby looked on with amazement and utter want of understanding, but rather amused than displeased at the scene.

At sunset the Wiesenhofbauer came into the room—there was no escape, Boldl would have it, and the father had to do it—gravely smiling and congratulating Froni on her recovery. Then he sat down on the chair and began to play with the baby, trying in succession several topics. But talking of this and talking of that would not bring the Bauer any nearer to what he had to say. He grew impatient with himself, nothing would prove an introduction. What he had to say must be spoken out by itself, right from beginning to end, and he did not care to meet with his son before the thing was done. So, putting down his pride, he suddenly broke out:

"Well, Froni, if thou wilt have my son, take him."

Veronica smiled. "What am I to do with so wild a boy?"

"Well, what am *I* to do with him in the end? I want to get rid of him. Thou might'st try to tame him—I can't!"

"Shall I try, indeed?"

"Do try, in Heaven's name!" And the old man lay his blessing

hand upon the golden hair of the woman. She drew it down and pressed it to her lips; her tears fell hot upon it. The old man, too, cried. Coming out of the room, he fell into the arms of his son. "Thou hast been listening, rascal!"

"No, father, I see in your face that all is right. Father, you were about to lose an only son—you have won him back and found a daughter."

"And a grandson," added the Bauer, who had grown fonder of the baby than he as yet cared to own.

Now, when you visit the Wiesenhof, you are greeted by little George, running about merrily in the yard, or riding on Tobi's old knee, or helping his grandfather to a fresh pipe. The Wiesenhofbauer has given up all work to his son; he enjoys sitting in the clean yard, under the little wine-covered verandah at the door, observing his children's active pursuits all day long; his eyes follow with smiling satisfaction the fair young woman so strangely beautiful in her simplicity, and his mouth is full of his daughter's praise. And in the comfortable, large bedroom, there stands a new cradle: Boldl has fetched it from town himself for his little daughter; she is but a fortnight old—an age we consider too young for her to appear on the scene—although her father manages to sit over the cradle for hours together contemplating her unrivalled beauty.

The mayor never got over his vexation. He sold his estates, and now lives in the town. Hannerl, by virtue of her money, was soon married to a townsman—a gentleman, her father said. She did not fail to produce her husband; together with a new bonnet of the last shape, matching her light grass-green town costume; in her native village, envied by many a girl who covered her fair head with a white or red silk handkerchief. The Wiesenhofbauer thought her bonnet was not worth Veronica's cap, and Veronica's rich golden hair of natural growth.

And so in the end all were satisfied and happy. Would you have it otherwise, dear reader?

M. S. E.

JEREMIAH HORROCKS.

"For myself, what I saw with my own eyes in the heavens supplied me with sufficient evidence of the certainty of the observation, almost all the circumstances of which I had predicted to my friends: and I silently congratulate myself that my correction of the motion of Venus, which I had not before sufficiently appreciated, has been confirmed beyond my utmost hopes."—HORROCKS'S "*Venus in Sole Visa.*" (Whatton's Translation.)

KEPLER, having completed the Rudolphine tables, which enabled him to calculate the motions of the inferior planets, arrived at the conclusion that a transit of Venus would occur on Dec. 6, 1631, towards sunset, and not again during that century: this he proclaimed to the world; but, dying in 1630, left others to watch for the fulfilment of his prediction. In obedience to his wishes, Gassendi, and many other astronomers, watched attentively with their telescopes when the time arrived; but no Venus appeared before the sun's disc: it is now well known that the transit of 1631 occurred at midnight, and hence the disappointment of the observant astronomers, who greatly lamented losing—as they thought—the only transit of Venus to occur during that century. But—*was* it the only one? The great Kepler—that "Prince of Astronomers"— had said it, and so all believed, little dreaming that there lived at that very time, in a quiet English village, a child of about twelve years old who was to predict celestial wonders, while his "youthful days were yet scarce complete;" who would choose for his theme "Venus the Queen of Love, veiled by the shade of Phœbus' light."*

And his predictions would be fulfilled.

This child, who was destined to astonish the scientific world, was born at Toxteth near Liverpool, in the year 1619, or, as some say, 1616. His name was Jeremiah Horrocks. His ancestry—King Arthur-like—is shrouded in mystery, which is not astonishing, considering the stormy times in which he drew his first breath; a time when soldiers were wont to burn registers, wills, and other priceless documents.

Toxteth, in those days of persecution, was a safe retreat for the sorrowful Puritans; and there they lived in such simplicity and virtue that, by many, this rural hamlet was called "The Holy Land of Toxteth." In 1612 the little community, careful for the education of their children, built a school-house, and, in 1619, a chapel; for they

* Horrocks's own words, which are interspersed throughout this article, are quoted chiefly from his treatise, "Venus in Sole Visa" (Whatton's translation); and from his letters to Crabtree, given in the "Opera Posthuma," edited by Dr Wallis. We have also gleaned from other portions of the latter, when it has seemed desirable that Horrocks should speak for himself.

had hitherto prayed together and worshipped in a shady glen called "The Dingle." Richard Mather, the celebrated Puritan, who subsequently emigrated to New England, was chosen, first teacher, then minister to the people of Toxteth.

The boy Horrocks, at the age of thirteen or fifteen, left the secluded place of his nativity, and travelled, probably partly on foot, partly on horseback, to the University of Cambridge, where he wished to study for the Church. He entered as sizar at Emanuel College, matriculating in the summer of 1632. Some have considered the fact of his being on the college foundation conclusive as to the very humble character of his origin; but to us it seems merely to prove that his parents were slenderly provided with money, while it favours the supposition of their belonging to the educated classes, who would leave no plan untried to obtain university training for this child of "very strange, unaccountable genius." Horrocks, in his writings, alludes more than once, but with perfect obedience and resignation, to his "poverty." This same "poverty" was probably the reason of his being obliged to leave Cambridge before he had graduated. We see in the registers of Emanuel College, the following entry appended to the name of Jeremiah Horrocks—"did not graduate." As it is well known that he studied hard, possessed wonderful capabilities, and was remarkable for the beauty of his disposition and his stainless life, it must have been cruel poverty alone which shortened for him the career of study he loved so well. It appears that he bid farewell to college scenes in 1635. During his brief stay at Cambridge, the boy had worked not only diligently but successfully. He had first studied the subjects then included in an academical education; after this, he had given himself up for a time to the enjoyment of the Latin authors, in order to master the language which was in those days the key to all knowledge and the medium of communication among the learned. In this study he attained considerable proficiency, as is attested by his elegant Latin treatise, "Venus in Sole Visa."

In his hours of recreation the youthful collegian would stroll out into the country, far away from his companions, and in the solitude of the fields he would peacefully enjoy the beauties of nature: there he would "stand still and consider the wondrous works of God," gazing upwards at the "stars of light." "It seemed to me," he said, "that nothing could be more noble than to contemplate the manifold wisdom of my Creator as displayed amidst such glorious works." As he gazed, he was seized with a desire to understand, and to "feed upon their beauty by a more careful examination of their mechanism." He resolved, therefore, to obtain access, if possible, to the sublime secrets of astronomy.

With this in view, as a preliminary step, he devoted his energies to the study of mathematics, for which he had already evinced a remarkable

aptitude. When the time came that he should approach the object of his ambition, and commence his "commerce with the heavens," he was at the outset amazed at "the abstruse nature of the science," which, moreover, was not then taught at Cambridge. He climbed the first steep and difficult ascent in solitude, without guidance, without sympathy; but, being fired with enthusiasm, he never failed in courage. "To complain of philosophy," he said, "on account of its difficulties would be foolish and unworthy." He determined that "the tediousness of study should be overcome by industry; his poverty (failing a better method) by patience; and that instead of a master, he would use astronomical books." He was strengthened also, by the examples of those who had successfully climbed the hill before him. In allusion to Tycho Brahe, Kepler, and others, he writes:—"It was a pleasure to me to meditate upon the fame of these great masters of science, and to emulate them in my aspirations." And again, calling to remembrance how many had overcome difficulties as great as his own, he says: "Having heard of others acquiring knowledge without greater help, I would blush that anyone should be able to do more than I."

But amid all his brave determination, there is one thing to which he cares not to be reconciled: and this is the want of the "sympathy of companionship." He touchingly complains of being unable to "imbue others with a love for astronomy," lamenting that "most of his friends care little for science; but rather for their hawks and hounds, to say no worse:" still, he allows that "England is not without votaries of astronomy; with some of whom," he adds, "I am acquainted."

That love with which he could not imbue others, triumphed over all the difficulties that beset his path; and before long he found himself on heights which he had viewed from a distance, scarcely hoping to attain. "I have been blessed," he says, "by God's grace, with such success that even now I have somewhat to be proud of."

On quitting Cambridge, he returned to the seclusion of his native village, where he remained for three years, 1635–1638, probably teaching, or in some way patiently working for his daily bread, while awaiting a curacy. During this period of industrious waiting his time was so economised as to allow many hours to be spent in the observation of the starry heavens. He now rejoiced in the possession of a telescope, which he cherished and loved as a friend, occasionally gratefully extolling it in Latin verse; while in his calmer moods he thus enumerates the merits of the "sight-assisting tube," which enabled "his mortal eyes to scan the furthest heavens." He writes: "I possessed a telescope of my own of such power as to show even the smallest spots upon the sun, and to enable me to make the most accurate division of his disc; one which in all my observations, I have found to represent objects with the greatest truth."

And now, let us see what light can be thrown on those suggestive words quoted above: "with some of whom I am acquainted."

Amid the sublime joys of his midnight studies, the "excellent youth Horrocks," as he has been called, still desired human companionship. While at Toxteth he would sometimes entreat "sundry passers-by" to gaze at the planet Venus in her crescent phase: the villagers, because the telescope was to them a strange instrument, failed to see what, to Horrocks, clearly glittered forth in resplendent beauty; thus he was left in sad solitude, and it was in vain that he invited the rustics of Toxteth to share with him what he called his "Uranian banquets." But he was not much longer to be saddened by this lack of sympathy.

There dwelt in Lancashire at that time an English gentleman of high culture, named Christopher Townley, who, as we read, "stuck not at any cost or labour to promote as well astronomical and other mathematical studies, by a diligent correspondence kept and maintained with the learned professors in these sciences."

The marvellous young astronomer hidden from the world, and moving among quiet scenes at Toxteth, was not unknown to this generous patron of science, who had, moreover, discovered three other "votaries of astronomy"—William Milbourn, curate of Brancepath, Durham, who, amid the pastoral duties of his remote little parish, found some leisure for the beautiful and intricate study of which Horrocks was enamoured; William Gascoigne, inventor of the micrometer, and the youthful representative of a good old Yorkshire family; and William Crabtree, of Broughton, near Manchester, "who had few superiors in mathematical learning," as Horrocks tells us. Why should not these "four lights of the Northern Hemisphere," as they are called by a contemporary, be linked together by correspondence? So thought Christopher Townley, who accordingly took means to "bring them to the acquaintance of one another," on which account he was greatly loved by all the four."

And now the solitude in study was at an end: for there was an especial affinity between Horrocks and William Crabtree, who soon became bound together by a firm friendship which lasted until death parted them.

In 1638 Horrocks was appointed to the curacy of Hoole, near Preston. Hoole was, in those days, a dreary and isolated village,

> "Far from resort of people that did pas
> In traveill to and fro."

But Horrocks was happy in his new home: he gave his mind to the conscientious discharge of his pastoral duties: never failing: always at his post. What was it to him that Hoole was removed from the rest of the world? He courted peaceful scenes: he loved an open country, where he could enjoy an unbroken view of the overhanging firmament, "fretted with golden fires." He was contented with the little

church of St. Michael, beautiful in its tasteful simplicity; and in it he placed a sun-dial, on which he inscribed the words: "Sine sole sileo," while on the church-clock was this motto, "Ut hora sic vita." We suppose in both cases the inscriptions were chosen by the young curate: but this is not proved.

In the early days of his astronomical studies Horrocks had met with a treatise in which Lansberg was mentioned with unqualified praise: he straightway desired to see the writings of the Belgian astronomer, some of which, in spite of his poverty, he managed, with some difficulty, to obtain; and these he studied assiduously, nothing doubting, for Lansberg proclaimed his astronomical tables to be infallible, and this with such confidence as to point to the conclusion that they had been tested and proved beyond possibility of doubt. Horrocks, who had himself made most careful calculations, was constantly annoyed at finding those of Lansberg not in harmony with his own. No longer working totally alone, he consulted his friend; and here Crabtree did him valuable service. Feeling great faith in the work done by Horrocks, he dared to suggest that it was Lansberg who was in error. And this proved true. Horrocks, on this discovery, was fired with indignation at the conceit of the "boasting Belgian:" but it was not long before he "freely forgave" him, for having introduced him to the writings of Kepler—although in the way of disparagement; and more than this:—he again pardons "the miserable arrogance of the Belgian astronomer," and ceases to lament the misapplication of his time, as he was thereby led to consider and foresee the appearance of Venus in the Sun.

He resolved for the future, "with his own eyes, to observe the positions of the stars in the heavens:" he made use of his own ephemerides to ascertain "the positions of the distant planets, and was thus enabled to predict their conjunctions, their appulses to the fixed stars, and many other extraordinary phenomena."

While pursuing his independent observations, a strange light dawned upon him: he received the first intimation concerning what he dared not yet predict. The lovely planet Venus now attracted his especial regard.

Horrocks reverently honoured Kepler, "to whose discoveries alone," he said, "all who understand the science of astronomy will allow that we owe more than to those of any other person." Nevertheless, never forgetful of his resolution to investigate all for himself, he set to work with much seriousness to correct Kepler's calculations of the motions of the Sun and Venus, "an undertaking," he says, which could not be displeasing to Kepler himself, as he frankly confesses that these matters were not as yet freely explored." As Horrocks proceeded in his work the light that had dawned upon him grew clearer and clearer, till at last he, feeling perfectly assured, on Oct. 26, 1639, wrote

thus to his friend :—"My reason for now writing is to advise you of a remarkable conjunction of the Sun and Venus on the 24th of November, when there will be a transit. As such a thing has not happened for many years past, and will not occur again in this century, I earnestly entreat you to watch attentively with your telescope, in order to observe it as well as you can," &c.

During the weeks which intervened between the prediction and its fulfilment, the chance of a clouded atmosphere caused great anxiety to the two friends. Horrocks observes that "Jupiter and Mercury were in conjunction with the Sun almost at the same time as Venus, which remarkable assemblage of the planets," he adds, "(as if they were desirous, of beholding, in common with ourselves, the wonders of the heavens, and of adding to the splendour of the scene) seemed to forebode great severity of weather. In this apprehension," he further remarks, "I coincide with the opinion of the astrologers, because it is confirmed by experience; but in other respects I cannot help despising their more than puerile vanities."

The day at last arrived: it was Sunday; Horrocks—who had not anyone at hand to assist in the appointed services—would be compelled twice to quit his astronomical observation. But, in spite of this—happier than Kepler—he witnessed the fulfilment of his prediction.

"When the time of the observation approached," he says, "I retired to my apartment, and, having closed the windows against the light, I directed my telescope, previously adjusted to a focus, through the aperture, towards the sun, and received his rays at right angles upon the paper already mentioned. The sun's image exactly filled the circle, and I watched carefully and unceasingly for any dark body that might enter upon the disc of light."

Horrocks, having officiated at the afternoon service, returned just in time to behold the dark body enter upon the disc of light. Venus was faithful to the hour he had prophesied; he, in his rapture of joy, was still master of himself: in the short period available, he took accurate observations of "the phenomenon which," he writes, "I was enabled by Divine Providence to complete so effectually that I could scarcely have wished for a more extended period."

William Crabtree had also seen the transit: but—"rapt in contemplation, he became almost unconscious through excess of joy," and was thus incapacitated for observing.

Shortly after this triumphant achievement Horrocks visited Toxteth; intending from thence to travel to Broughton to see William Crabtree, a joy on which he had long set his heart. He wrote, fixing January 4, 1641, for this meeting: "I shall be with you on that day," he said, "if nothing unforeseen should occur." But something unforeseen did occur.

On January 3rd, very early in the morning, to the sorrow and amaze-

ment of those few who knew him, and to the never-ceasing regret of astronomers, this remarkable youth died quite suddenly.

William Crabtree, although he lived on, never forgot his "dear Horrocks," his "second self." "Irreparable loss! And I am bereaved of my dearest Horrocks!" he wrote on the packet of letters he had received from his friend. In writing of him to Gascoigne a year after the sudden and sorrowful event, he says: "for whose immature death there is scarce a day which I pass without some pang of sorrow."

At Hoole Church, where Horrocks officiated as a hard-working curate on a small pittance—through the exertions of the present rector, the Rev. R. Brickel, to whom we are also indebted for the late Mr. Whatton's valuable translation of "Venus in Sole Visa"—there is a suitable Memorial erected in honour of one "so young and yet so learned: so learned and yet so pious."

It is impossible here to allude to much important astronomical work done by Horrocks, some of whose theories Sir Isaac Newton himself —who calls him "that excellent astronomer, Horrocks"—adopted as "more logical than any yet brought forward." The scientific men of the 17th century constantly mentioned the name of Horrocks with appreciation and affection, lamenting bitterly his early death. "It was a great loss," says James Gregory, the mathematican, in writing to Collins, "that he died so young: many naughty fellows live till eighty."

The vast and costly preparations now being made throughout the civilized world for the observation of the transit of December 9, 1874, would have greatly astonished and gratified the first observer of that phenomenon, who accomplished so much with such a scarcity of means. Venus will appear before the Sun's disc once more during this century, namely in 1882, and not again until June 9th, 2004. How changed will all be then! How much will be entirely forgotten which interests us now! But as the astronomers of 2004 begin to watch for Venus, at a little before nine o'clock on that distant morning, surely they cannot fail to remember Jeremiah Horrocks.

A SUMMER'S HISTORY.

"YOU think you love me well enough to trust your happiness in my hands, Robert?"

Margaret Wayne asked the question seriously. She wanted her lover to think what he was doing, in asking her to be his wife.

"I do not think: I know," he answered, with all a lover's eagerness. "You will not tell me no, Margery?"

"I will not tell you no, Robert," she answered, with a grave, sweet smile.

He slipped a ring upon her finger: and, bending down, lifted her face in his hands, and kissed her with a betrothal kiss.

"Mine now," he said, tenderly, "and mine always."

They had wandered into the orchard of the old Wayne homestead, and it was there he had made his offer. She sat on still under the large pear tree when he was gone, and thought it all over. A year ago, Robert Earl was a stranger to her. Now he was her lover; her promised husband; and she was happy. Mr. Earl had settled in the neighbourhood. He was an independent man, a gentleman, desirable in all ways. Margaret had learned to love him as one can love but once in this world.

Sitting there, she wondered if there had ever been so beautiful a day before. The sky was blue as it had ever been on any summer day since Eden. The growing, rich grass in the meadow crinkled like a sea when the warm south wind blew over it. The apple and pear trees were in full blossom, and the air was full of their delightful fragrance. Every wind that blew up the hill-side shook their pink-and-white leaves down about her like a shower of scented snow. Robins sang in the branches; sang loud, and clear, and long; and over all the sun shone warm and bright.

"A beautiful day in which to have such happiness come into my life," she said, softly, with a deep exultant stir of gladness at her heart. It was so sweet to know that he loved her best of anybody in the world: that they were to walk through life side by side.

"I wonder if I can accept this day's sunshine as a prophecy of coming days? I hope so. Dear Robert!" And then she dropped her head upon her hands, and fell to musing in a quiet, happy way, as maidens will, about the glad, beautiful dream of life, whose other name is love.

By-and-by, she rose and went into the house: a substantial, old-fashioned dwelling, with a good deal of land attached to it. Mrs. Wayne looked up from her work as she entered.

"Margery, here's a letter for you. It has come by the afternoon post. I think it is from May Callingford."

"Yes, it is from May," replied Margaret, as she opened it. "She has accepted your invitation, mamma, and will come and stay all the summer."

"I shall be very glad to see Mary's child," was the answer of Mrs. Wayne: Mary being her sister; but they had not met for many years. "May was a baby when I saw her last: she is a woman grown now, I suppose. Dear! dear! How fast time runs away, and how people change. It does not seem so very long ago but you were a baby too, Margery, and your father was alive: and yet how many years it is!"

Mrs. Wayne looked thoughtfully away toward the hill where the church-spire pointed heavenward. In the grave-yard there, her husband slept beside the boy and girl who had gone to Heaven before him. She often read the names carved on the three white stones, and wondered when hers would stand beside them.

"I am sure you will like her," Margery said, that night, to her lover, as they lingered by the gate, in the shadow of the great lilac-bush, crowned right royally with nodding plumes of fragrant blossoms. "I have never seen May, but I have her picture; and I have almost come to know her through her letters. Beautiful letters they are. I would read some of them to you, Robert, if I thought you'd like to hear them."

"I would rather hear you talk to me," he answered. "Let me crown you, Margery."

He broke some lilac-blossoms from their stalks, and wove them deftly into a wreath. When he had finished it he placed it on her brown hair.

"Margaret, my queen," he whispered, and bent to steal a kiss.

And she, looking in his blue smiling eyes and tender face, thought that no maiden had ever so true and brave a lover before.

I wonder if every maiden, since the world began, has not thought the same thing? All too many have. And all too many men have, like him, mistaken the liking born of companionship for love.

Margaret plunged into a sea of small cares in preparation for this coming of her cousin, May Callingford. She felt a strange anxiety to see her, and to have her near her. Later, she wondered why it should have been so.

"I begin to be half jealous of this wonderful cousin of yours," Robert said to her one day. "You talk about her half your time: what will it be when she is here? I shall be crowded into the shade completely, I suppose. I almost wish she wasn't coming."

"Now you ought to be ashamed to talk so!" cried Margery, in jest. "I have not the least doubt but that I shall be the one to complain of being thrust into the shade, and no doubt I shall get fearfully

jealous. Of course you will admire May's pretty face—and she *is* pretty, we hear; and the first thing you'll do will be to fall in love with her. The consequence will be, that I shall be neglected shamefully, all on account of man's fickleness. Oh, you see, sir, that I understand all about you men!"

"Wise little woman," laughed Robert. "From personal experience, I suppose?"

"From keeping my eyes and ears open," answered Margery.

"But I thought you had faith in me?" he said, touching the brown hair that shaded her smiling, peaceful face.

"Well, yes, I have a little faith in you," she admitted.

"I don't see how you can have, taking your knowledge of the fickleness and insincerity of men into consideration," returned Mr. Earl, his fingers still lingering on the soft hair. "I should like to hear you explain the seeming inconsistency."

"Well, you see," with a laugh that was as happy as a bird's song. "you are not exactly like other men. I think you are a trifle—just a trifle, mind—better than the most of them. And then, you know that you of the stronger sex have a belief which passes current among you, to the effect that a woman is never consistent. Either will explain why I happen to put a little faith in you, sir."

"A good specimen of feminine logic," he said, laughingly. "How does it happen that you think me just a trifle better than most men, Margery?"

"Because—because—I—care perhaps just a little for you," was Margery's answer, driven into a corner. And Robert Earl laughed until she blushed again.

The day of Miss Callingford's arrival came; and Mr. Earl happened to be there. All looked at her eagerly. A girl with a sweet clear face, out of which shone a pair of the most beautiful eyes Robert Earl had ever seen; large, and almost like a child's in their innocent expression, and blue as early violets. There was something about them that made him think of that flower. From under the pretty straw hat, soft yellow hair fell about her face, and hung over her shoulders almost to her waist.

"You are May, I know," cried Margaret, impulsively running to her. "We cannot tell you how welcome you are, and how we have longed for this day."

And for some moments there was nothing but greeting.

"This is my cousin May, Mr. Earl," said Margaret, proud of introducing one who had so fair and sweet a face.

"I am truly happy to meet your cousin May," said Robert, gravely; yet with a twinkle of mischief in his eyes, and a shy look at Margaret, who blushed beneath the inquiring glance which May gave her.

May gave him her hand, and said a few half-embarrassed words;

but they were enough to make him feel that he should like her. He had a theory that the first few words of a stranger always afforded him a kind of revelation of what the acquaintance was to be, by the way in which they affected him. If that theory held good in this case, the acquaintance would be a pleasant one.

In the evening, coming in to tea, he met her again. She wore a dress of some soft white material, with a knot of pale green at the throat, and a cluster of white geraniums in her hair.

"She is a beautiful little thing," thought Robert. "She is like my ideal of Undine."

Before tea was half over, he felt as if he must have known May for years. He said as much in a half-jesting way.

"Perhaps that fancy of someone's, that you were reading to me the other day, is true," spoke up Margaret. "You know what I mean, don't you, Robert? The fancy that we have been with people, somewhere and sometime, and yet we know that we and they have never before met."

"But how can it be?" asked May.

"Well, the idea in the book was that in some other life, some other stage of existence, we knew them, and that when we met in this life for the first time, some strange instinct that could hardly be called memory told us that we had not always been strangers to each other. Pretty and fanciful, is it not, May?"

"It would make a beautiful poem," answered May.

"So that probably accounts for your feeling of having known her, Robert," laughed Margaret.

There was some singing later. Margaret was a fine musician; played with peculiar power, and sang with a great deal of true feeling and expression. She had a low, sweet voice, which was just suited to some of the old ballads that we so seldom hear in these artificial days —for both the songs and the times are artificial now. May Callingford sang next. Her voice was sweet as a bird's. Robert Earl involuntarily thought of dropping water as he listened to its liquid softness.

"Sing that new song that you were trying this morning, Margaret," said Mrs. Wayne. "I liked it."

A moment's hesitation on Margaret's part, she knew not why, and then she looked out the song, and began. The air was touchingly tender and sweet in itself; the accompaniment was full of plaintive minor chords, like an undertone of sorrow that no words could express. The words were sad as any words could well be; and, sung in Margaret's expressive way, they seemed to come from her own heart:—

When I am covered with the grass,
If my low grave you chance to pass,
Oh pause one moment, one, I pray,
And in that surely-coming day,

Say, as you pluck the pimpernel,
"Here lieth one who loved me well."

And so I shall not be forgot;
You'll miss me, though you love me not.
Love is so sweet a memory
That, though it came to you from me,
You'll think of it, and thrill to tell
That one has lived who loved you well.

Oh! when you pass my grave, and see
The blossoms blooming for the bee,
And hear the south-wind saying mass,
Like wandering friars who chance to pass,
O'er incense cups of pimpernel,
Oh, think of her who loved you well!

The last low chord of the accompaniment died away like a sigh. There was a silence in the room after Margaret had finished the song. It seemed to affect them strangely. She had put so much soul into it that it was hardly like a song. It was more like the passionate plaint of a heart to whom love had been denied; a heart trying, in a pitiful way, to find some little consolation in the thought that, after all, it would not be quite forgotten.

May broke the silence. "I don't like your song, Margaret," she said, with a shiver. "It is sorrowfully sweet, but I don't like it. I sha'n't forget it the whole evening. I never could sing such sad things."

"And yet such songs strike deeper chords in our hearts than any other," was Margaret's answer. "I never tire of songs like this. Your gay ones, with not a bit of heart and soul in them, I always sing under protest."

"But how sad that life must be which can truly give forth so sorrowful a cry as that which runs through the song you sang," observed Miss Callingford, looking thoughtfully away towards the hills bathed in summer moonlight. "It must be the saddest thing in life to be obliged to sit apart, and see others loving and being loved, while your heart calls for something which is always denied it."

"It would be far better to die," said Margaret, earnestly. "If I loved anyone with my whole heart, and that love should be thrown aside as unvalued, or unwelcome, I should wish to die!"

"So you say now," returned May. "But if you were put to the test——"

"If I were put to the test," interrupted Margaret, "it would be the same. I could not alter. Life to me without love would be valueless."

"'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all,'" quoted May, laughing.

"Not unless the loss be occasioned by death," answered Margaret, with strange gravity. "And that, after all, is not a loss. It is merely

a parting; you are still able to look forward to a meeting which shall be eternal. I speak only of the alienation of the heart. This, indeed, is a change far worse than that of death."

"You feel strongly on this point," said May. "That is the reason, Margaret, that you put so much pathos into your song—that terrible song," she added, with a shudder. "It seemed to come straight up from your heart. And yet you have had no experience of this kind."

"No," replied Margaret, with a half sad smile. "But we know many things by intuition. We are, most of us, constitutionally happy or melancholy; the bent of our nature is to be one or the other. We cast trouble aside when it comes to us, or we meet it half-way. I fear I am of the latter class. I have not enough hope to make me of a cheerful temperament; I need the help of, and am greatly influenced by, externals."

"A path strewed with roses, for instance, from which the thorns have been extracted," laughed May. "A fairy godmother, to change pumpkins into coaches, and find you a prince for a husband."

Margaret blushed, and looked shily towards Robert. Her prince had come without the aid of any fairy godmother. She felt half vexed with May for the remark.

"You are jesting now," she replied, quietly. "But it is a subject I cannot jest with. Real sadness is so terrible. And I have always had a presentiment that my life would be a sad one."

"I know no one whose life should be more happy," returned May. "No one whose future seems to me so fair and promising. You have been reared in a home of peace and plenty; and you will leave it under the protection of one ——"

"Be quiet," cried Margaret, laughing, in spite of herself. "It is true that my life hitherto has known no cares but the cares of others. I have had none of my own. But I often observe, that in proportion to the happiness of the early life so is the trouble and care of the later. I don't know why it should be; but it is so. No doubt it is for some good end. I remember some years ago having my fortune told ——"

"Oh, Margie," interrupted May, pretending to be shocked. "By an old witch in a red cloak, no doubt, who walked on a stick and was bent half double. With nose and chin that met like a pair of nut-crackers. Confess to the portrait."

"You must have seen her in a dream," replied Margaret, laughing. "You have described her exactly. Only you have not done justice to her eyes; they were the blackest, most piercing eyes I ever saw. I wake up sometimes with those eyes upon me."

"And you crossed her hand with silver," continued May. "For that she would promise you a duke. Or perhaps you even crossed it with gold, and were promised a prince. Fie, Margaret; could you put faith in an old witch?"

"I know not whether she could lay claim to the title of witch," replied Margaret, firmly; "but this I do know. She described some of my past life so accurately; things she could never have known; that I almost felt I was wrong in putting no faith in what she said of my future."

"And what said she of that future?" asked May, whose curiosity was aroused, in spite of her pretended ridicule.

"I cannot tell you all," replied Margaret, with a shudder. "But I will tell you a little. She looked long and closely at my hand with her keen black eyes——have you ever noticed my hand," said Margaret, interrupting herself, and holding it out for May's inspection. "Look at it, May."

May took the white, delicate hand, and examined the palm. It was strangely covered with lines, crossing and recrossing each other. No part was free.

"Do you observe the creases?" said Margaret. "Examine it by your own."

May's was comparatively smooth and free from lines.

"A strange difference indeed," said May. "But you don't put faith in this nonsense, Margaret? What said the old witch?"

"She said, looking, as I have told you, long and closely into my hand, 'Your past life, young lady, has been happy; free from trouble; free from any eventful circumstance. At the age of twenty a great change in life will come to you. Then beware. Your last hour will be at hand.'

"'How shall I find my death, good mother?' I asked, half in ridicule, half frightened.

"'I cannot see,' she answered. 'The line of life is dim; the end is concealed from me. But this I see; you will not die a natural death; you will not die in your bed. Yet you will not die by illness; you will not die by water. I dare not look further. I can only say beware. Refuse the change when it comes: continue for some years to live as you have lived hitherto, and I see that you will be saved, and you may live to a green old age. Despise my warning, and you are lost.'"

Margaret ceased speaking, and May did not reply. In Margaret's eyes there was a sad, far-away look, that seemed to penetrate into the future; a future without happiness.

Robert Earl had not spoken. Suddenly he began wondering what Margaret would do if he were to desert her for another. It was a strange thought, he told himself, to come into his head, then and there; but it did come, and he could not get rid of it. All the evening it haunted him: that, and the sad look in Margaret's eyes. It was with him when he walked home, and when he undressed to go to rest.

The days flew by swiftly, as pleasant days do fly. Mrs. Wayne had

said to Robert Earl, "You must be with us a great deal, to help entertain my niece: I should not like her to find this place more dull than it is." And he had acquiesced readily.

So that he saw much of May Callingford: he grew to seek to be with her. He liked to talk with her, and watch her beautiful eyes grow darker and wider at some new thought, or some sudden play of fancy. He half thought he could tell what she was thinking of by her face, it was so full of child-like frankness.

From the first May had liked Robert Earl. He was so different from any man she had ever known before. But in what the difference consisted, she could not have told herself: and not a suspicion yet dawned upon her that it was caused by *love:* that she was learning to love him.

"How noble Robert is!" she said one night to Margaret. "I don't know why I like him so well; but I never cared half so much for anyone before. I think you ought to be very proud of him, Margie. I quite envy you."

The last words were spoken in a playful way; but Margaret saw that there was more meaning in them than she intended to show. Beneath their lightness there ran a vein of earnestness. It made itself apparent in the thoughtful eyes and serious brow which May turned towards the hills, lying wrapt in holy, peaceful silence, beneath the benediction of the moonlight.

And Margaret's heart gave a sudden throb that was full of keen pain. Was her cousin learning to love Robert? She could not wonder much if it were so, for who could help loving him? But oh, not with her love! No, no! Her heart rebelled against that. She wanted him for herself; and no one else must look with yearning eyes upon that which belonged to her, and her alone.

It is curious how a chance word, light as the lightest wind, will set us to thinking and watching sometimes. Those words of May's had that effect on Margaret. She lay awake half that night, thinking. What if May loved Robert? She tried to put the thought out of her mind, but it would not leave her.

"How foolish I am!" she thought. "Of course, it would not make the slightest difference between Robert and me, if all the Mays in the world loved him. He cares for me—has he not told me so?—and for no one else in the whole world.

Nevertheless, that foolish question—that thought—kept repeating itself over and over for hours in Margaret's mind. She could not forget it while she slept: worse still, she could not forget it in awaking. Was it the shadow of some evil substance?

In spite of herself, Margaret watched them when they were together next day; she could not help it. As Mr. Earl entered, she saw May's face grow hot and glad and bright; and—she fancied that his did. Then she blamed herself for being so foolish as to imagine any such

thing. He liked May as his cousin—who could help liking her?—and he had that low-voiced, caressing way with women.

But from that time there was a dark cloud over Margaret's sky. It grew large and black. For, try to hide the truth as she might, she could not conceal the knowledge from herself, that no common friendship existed between her cousin and the man she had promised to marry. She read the bitter fact in sudden glances of tenderness, in low words, which in themselves revealed nothing, but in whose cadences love spoke in that strange and wordless language of its own. She could interpret it, because it was a language she had been learning to read the sweetest lesson of life in.

At first she fought against the bitter truth. She would not believe that the man who had won her love, and who, before heaven, was her promised husband, had no longer the true affection for her that he had once boasted of. She tried to believe that she was self-deceived: that she was jealous of her lover without a cause, because she loved him so, and wanted him always at her side in a foolishly exacting way.

But there will come a time when our eyes, which we shut against a bitter truth, must open, and we have to look the matter fairly and squarely in the face. And that time came to Margaret.

She was in the garden one day alone. Her countenance of late had grown sad, full of thoughtful shadows; and, as she walked up and down the paths slowly, a great pain showed itself in her eyes, and in the lines around her mouth.

"Am I losing him?" she cried, passionately. "Am I to see him go over to another? And I thought he loved me so well! He told me so! He told me so!"

Just then she heard the murmur of voices, and, looking up, saw May and Robert going slowly towards the house, on the other side the shrubbery. The foliage concealed her from them.

Robert was saying something to May in a low, earnest tone. Margaret could not tell what it was, but something in his look and manner made her for the moment faint and dizzy. The words reached her ears.

"God bless you, my darling!" And then Robert Earl—her lover—bent suddenly, and kissed May's face, which was wet with tears.

"Oh, Robert!" May cried, "you forget! I have told you, you must not forget. Margaret is the only one who has a right to your kisses. Nay, I must not listen: though you do love me, you must still be true to your promise to her. I wish I had never come here. If I had stayed away, you and Margaret might have been happy; but now ——"

May Callingford's voice broke down in tears, and she turned and ran away towards the house, leaving Robert standing there alone, with a grave and shadowed face. Alas! it was too true that love had come to him.

Could Margaret make believe to deceive herself longer? At last she knew the truth: she stood face to face with it.

He loved her! Robert Earl, who was dearer to her than her whole life, loved another. And that other her cousin, beautiful May! She kept repeating the hard truth over and over, as she stood there in the garden; and it seemed as if every bird's song said the same thing.

For hours she paced up and down the walks, thinking, thinking, thinking!

What should she do? Should she give him back his freedom; and thus, with her own hands, put all the sunshine out of her life which his love had brought into it? A whole, whole life without him! Her heart cried out against that. But could she marry him, knowing that he loved another? Could she lay claim to that heart which she had once thought hers, but was hers no longer? No, no!

"Where is May?" she asked when she went in. And Mrs. Wayne replied that May had a headache and was lying on the sofa in the quiet little breakfast-parlour.

The young ladies shared the same bed-room. May went up first that night, under plea of her headache; and Margaret hoped she would be in her bed and asleep. But no. When Margaret went, May was sitting by the window, with a strange, pitiful look on her face.

"Oh, Margie! Margie!" she cried, when her cousin came in, "I am so miserable. You don't know, you can't know what it is; and I—I cannot tell you. And bending her head upon the window-ledge, the girl sobbed as if her heart was breaking.

"I do know," Margaret said, softly.

May flashed a sudden, frightened look into her cousin's face. "No one can know. It is not possible."

"I am not blind," answered Margaret, as calmly and kindly as might be, but there was a strange sound of pain in her voice. "I see how it is, May, and I think it will all come right. If you love each other, I will not stand between you."

No one but herself and God ever knew what an awful struggle it cost her to say that. The words left her lips white as death.

Margie, are you an angel?" gasped May. "Only an angel could offer to give up a life's hope and happiness to another. Do you think I am base enough to accept it, at that price? Never, never!"

"But, May,"—and Margaret's voice was low and steady now,—"I want a man's whole love; a love that is given freely. Could I take Robert Earl because he thinks I have a claim on any promise he may have made, before he fully understood his love has left me—do you think I could be his wife?"

"But he does love you!" returned May, earnestly. "Yes, he told me so to-day. The—the fancy he took for me is not real; and —— oh, dear! oh, dear! I wish I had never come here, Margie! If Robert

and I had never met, he would never have dreamed of loving anyone else but you. I have brought trouble to you, and to him, and to myself, and I am not to blame, Margie. I wish you would believe that!" added May, earnestly, lifting her great, blue eyes to Margaret's face; and they were too truthful to be doubted. Margaret spoke not. She listened for more. *Was* there hope for her yet?

"No, Margaret, I never tried to make Robert Earl love me. Could I be so wicked and treacherous? I liked him from the first too much, too much; but, oh! I could not help it: I did not tell the love to come: and I never meant to let either of you find it out. But, someway, he did find it out, and I don't know how it happened, Margie, but he said some things to-day before he thought. It's all over now. I'm not going to see him when he comes here any more, and he will forget all about me in a little while. He's too good, too honourable to break his word with you, Margie, even if he wanted to; and I don't think he ever thought of that. Forgive me, Margie, but I never meant to pain you."

Margaret bent down, and kissed the pale, suffering face tenderly: a tear from her eyelids fell upon May's cheek. No, the poor young girl had not been intentionally cruel.

"Oh, Margie, you are so good!" involuntarily burst from May, flinging her arms about her cousin's neck, and hiding her face in her bosom. "I don't believe I could ever kiss anybody like that who had brought me the trouble that I have brought to you."

"But you did not wish to bring it," answered Margaret, softly. "If you had tried to win Robert away, I think I should have hated you with a terrible hatred. As it is, I cannot blame you."

"And it's all ended between Robert and me," May sobbed. "He understands that. And I shall leave you for home, Margaret, as soon as I can.

But there was no comfort for Margaret in May's words. Perhaps, in one sense, it might be all ended between Robert and May. But, knowing of the love between them, could she accept such a sacrifice as he must make in giving up May? If he loved May—as Margery believed he did—could he forget her? And she herself, she could not marry him if his heart was another's."

For a whole week Robert Earl did not come near the house. He knew not of any explanation; but he believed, as matters stood, he was better away from it.

One morning a maid came up-stairs to say Mr. Earl was below. May would not see him. "You go, Margie," she said. "I will not. He is yours only, and I will not come between you again. Remember that."

Margaret went down to meet Robert, with a pale, grave face. She tried to be calm, and outwardly she succeeded. But her heart was full of a strange and wild excitement.

At the first glance into her face, he knew that what he had hoped to keep secret from her was a secret no longer. It is only justice to Robert Earl to say that he meant to be honourable and true. He had resolved that neither May nor Margaret should discover the disloyalty of his heart; but in an unguarded moment his lips had got the better of his intentions, and in a few, swift, passionate words, he had told May that he loved her.

He never, thinking it over afterwards, realized fully what his words to Margaret were that day, nor what her replies were. The first that he comprehended clearly was when Margaret came up to him, and put her hand upon his arm, and looked him steadily in the face. There was no anger in it. It was kind, and sadly earnest.

"I know all, Robert," she said, simply. "May has told me. I do not blame either of you, because you could not help it. We cannot control our hearts. I am ready to give you back your ring, Robert—if you want it!"

She could not help saying those last words. Some faint hope stirred in her heart yet—that selfish heart of hers, she told herself—that he would refuse to accept his freedom; that he would prove to her that he loved her most.

"Margaret!"

Robert Earl covered his face with his hands, and was silent for a long time. When he looked up his face was very pale.

"I do not want the ring," he answered. "No."

"But—if it should be rightly hers?" gasped Margaret.

He was nearly as agitated as she was. "There must be truth between us now, Margaret, if nothing else. Believe me when I say that I do not understand my own heart. I believe I love you. I try to think of you always; but—but May's face keeps coming between us."

"*Which* is it?" breathed Margaret, from between her bloodless lips. "*I* don't understand."

"Nor I," he murmured. "Margaret, I don't deserve your kindness. I'm not half good enough for you, but I'll try to be. I am going away, and shall stay away until May has left; and I shall try to forget her, and remember only you. Perhaps I shall understand my heart better when I come back. At any rate, it is better for all of us that I should leave. As to the ring, keep it, Margaret; at least, no one as yet has any better right to it."

"God bless you, Robert!" Margaret said, softly. "I will keep your ring; and oh, Robert!"—and her voice was full of the passionate yearning for the happiness which seemed slipping away from her—"I would wear it gladly, if your love could be given with it! But if you find that your heart is more May's than mine, I will give it back to you. Unless your heart goes with the ring, it would be a fetter to me."

"You are a noble woman, Margaret," he said, putting his fingers on

her hair in the old caressing way. "I wonder how I ever could have cared for anyone else?"

Then he did care for her! The thought was so sweet! Margaret laid her head upon his shoulder, and he knew that she was weeping softly.

Mr. Earl went away, and the days crept on. Miss Callingford did not leave at present, some arrangements in her own family forbidding it. A strange, grieved look stole now and then into May's face that was sorrowful to see. Margaret always wanted to get away by herself and cry, when she saw it: she knew what May was thinking of.

Those were strange weeks to Margaret. Often it seemed to her as if she was a prisoner waiting for her sentence. Would it be life or death? Sometimes she was buoyant with wild hope; sometimes sunk in utter despondency.

And now the end of May's stay was really drawing near: and Margaret began to feel, in some strange and unaccountable way, that Robert would come back to her and tell her that he had found out his own heart, and it was hers. The feeling clung to her, and she began to be more like the Margaret of old than she had been for a long time.

"The morrow is very near," May said, on the last night of her visit, as she and Margaret were sitting by the window together. Everything was in readiness for her departure. "But, Margaret, I do not want to leave you feeling that there is any bitterness in your heart towards me, any blame for the past. You are sure, quite sure, that there is not?"

"I am quite sure," Margaret answered. "How could I blame you for that which you could not help?"

"I hope you will be very happy, Margie, you and Robert," May said, as she smoothed Margaret's hair tenderly back from her face. There was a quiver of pain in her voice; and tears came in Margaret's eyes as she heard it. "So young, so beautiful," ran her thoughts, "and to have so dreadful a sorrow to carry with her into coming years. Poor May!"

"I hope so," earnestly spoke Margaret, in answer. "May God be as good to you, May, as I hope He will be to me!"

The same night, in the depth of sleep, Margaret was aroused by a voice of terror calling to her from the other bed. She started up.

"What is it?" she asked. "Is anything the matter, May?"

"I think the house is on fire. Don't you hear it roar? And the room is full of smoke."

They sprang out of bed, and ran to the door; but had to shut it again as soon as opened. The landing, close to their room, was one vast billow of flame.

"Oh! what shall we do—what shall we do?" cried May, wildly. "There is no way of getting down; no way of escape!"

"Oh, Margaret! are we to die in this way?"

"I don't know, dear," answered Margaret, retaining her presence of mind, as she ran to the window. "Perhaps we can escape in some way. See! the neighbours are gathering. They will help us."

Unfastening the window, she flung it open. "Help! Help!" she cried. "Get a ladder, if you can. The house is full of fire."

At that moment a man came rushing in at the gate, pushing the assembling people right and left. Margaret knew him, and her heart gave a great leap.

"Robert, Robert, you will save us!" she cried. "Oh, May, I think God has sent him! He will dare what the others might not."

The fire was inside the room now: the wood of the old house was as tinder. The flames leaped and roared all about them. They heard the crash of falling timbers. Suddenly the ceiling above them fell, filling the room with a whirling mass of flame and smoke.

"Haste, haste!" cried Margaret to the men below. "The room is all on fire!"

Before the words left her lips, the end of a ladder appeared, and she heard a man's feet moving swiftly up the rounds.

"Oh, May, courage, courage!" she sobbed. "They are coming to save us."

Even at that self-same moment, the man's head was at the window, looking in.

"May! May!" he cried, in an eager voice, that was full of wild passion, of love, and awful fear. "My darling, where are you?"

"Here, here!" replied May, and sprang towards the window. "Oh, Robert, save me, save me!"

"I will save you, or die with you," he said; and his voice was full of a deeper tenderness than Margaret had ever heard in his voice before. "Cling to me, May; cling close, and trust me!"

And so Robert Earl chose between them! Oh, Margaret, where was your hope, then?

"Let me die!" she cried, with pallid lips: but it was not the fear of death which blanched them. "He does not love me. Let me die!"

And Margaret's prayer was answered. The smoke reached out fierce hands, and overshadowed her, before other help could arrive. It may have been—and the thought passed through her heart in dying—that Robert Earl did not know she was there.

There is a grave in a churchyard on the hill-side on which the grass has only grown one summer. It is that of Margaret Wayne.

"Almost the last words Margaret ever spoke were to tell me that she had no bitterness in her heart towards me," sobbed May one day, as she stood by it with her husband. "Dear Margaret! I think she is happier now than she would have been, even with you, Robert."

"Perhaps so," he answered, reverently. "God knows best!"

THREE KISSES OF FAREWELL.

THREE, only three, my darling,
Separate, solemn, slow ;
Not like the swift and joyous ones
We used to know,
When we kissed because we loved each other,
Simply to taste love's sweet,
And lavished our kisses as the summer
Lavishes heat ;
But as they kiss whose hearts are wrung,
When hope and fear are spent,
And nothing is left to give, except
A sacrament !

First of the three, my darling,
Is sacred unto pain ;
We have hurt each other often,
We shall again,
When we pine because we miss each other,
And do not understand
How the written words are so much colder
Than eye and hand.
I kiss thee, dear, for all such pain
Which we may give or take ;
Buried, forgiven before it comes,
For our love's sake.

The second kiss, my darling,
Is full of joy's sweet thrill ;
We have blessed each other always,
We always will.
We shall reach until we feel each other,
Beyond all time and space ;
We shall listen till we hear each other
In every place ;
The earth is full of messengers,
Which love sends to and fro ;
I kiss thee, darling, for all joy
Which we shall know !

The last kiss, oh ! my darling—
My love—I cannot see,
Through my tears, as I remember
What it may be.
We may die and never see each other,
Die with no time to give
Any sign that our hearts are faithful
To die, as live.
Token of what they will not see
Who see our parting breath.
This one last kiss, my darling, seals
The seal of death !

S.W.FAIN.S.C.
AH

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER 1, 1874.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHAT TO DO NEXT.

NOT to everyone among the children of men is given the power, the faculty, to act as comforter to others. To listen to another's sorrow, to be told the history of another's trouble, is one thing: to be able to give back comfort is another. That delicate intuitive sympathy with another's woe, which draws away the sting even in the telling of it; which makes that woe its own property, as it were; which sheds balm round the sufferer in every word, and look, and touch: this is surely as much a special gift as the gift of song, or the poet's fine phrenzy, and without it the world would be a much poorer place than it is.

This rare gift of sympathy was possessed by Edith Dering in a pre-eminent degree. She was at once emotional and sympathetic. To Lionel in his dire trouble she was a comforter in the truest sense of the word. It was she who preserved his mental balance—the equipoise of his mind. But for her sweet offices he would have become a monomaniac or a misanthrope of the bitterest kind. Naturally she had him with her as much as possible, but still his home was of necessity at Park Newton. To the world he was simply Richard Dering, the unmarried nephew of General St. George. It would not do for him to be seen going to Fern Cottage sufficiently often to excite either scandal or suspicion. He could only visit there as the intimate friend of Mrs. Garside and her niece. Sometimes he took his uncle with him, sometimes Tom, in order to divert suspicion. For him to enter the garden-gate of Fern Cottage was to cross the threshold of his earthly paradise. Edith and he had been married in the depth of a great trouble—troubles and danger had beset the path of their wedded life ever since. Owing, perhaps, to that very cause, week by week, and

month by month, their love seemed only to grow in depth and intensity. As yet it had lost nothing of its pristine charm and freshness. The gold-dust of romance lingered about it still. They were man and wife; they had been man and wife for months; but to the world at large they seemed nothing more than ordinary friends.

But all Edith's care and watchful love could not lift her husband, except by fits and starts, out of those moods of gloom and depression which seemed to be settling more closely down upon him day by day. As link after link was added to the chain of evidence, each one leading to incriminate his cousin still more deeply, his moods seemed to grow darker and more difficult of removal. With his cousin, Lionel associated no more than was absolutely necessary. They rarely met each other till dinner-time, and then they met with nothing more than a simple "How do you do?" and in conversation they never got beyond some half-dozen of the barest common-places. Lionel always left the table as soon as the cloth was removed.

On Kester's side there was no love lost. That dark, stern-faced cousin was a perpetual menace to him, and he hated him accordingly. He hated him for his likeness to his dead and gone brother. He hated him because of the look in his eyes—so coldly scrutinizing, so searching, so immovable. He hated him because it was a look that he could in nowise give back. Try as he might, he could not face Lionel's steady gaze.

For some two or three weeks after his return from Bath with Janvard's written confession, Lionel was perfectly quiescent. He took no further action whatever. He was, indeed, debating in his own mind what further action it behoved him to take. There was no need to seek for any further evidence, if indeed any more would have been forthcoming. All that he wanted he had now got; it was simply a question as to what use he should make of it. Day and night that was the question which presented itself before his mind: what use should he make of the knowledge in his possession? His mind was divided this way and that; day passed after day, and still he could by no means decide as to the course which it would be best for him to adopt.

Of all this he said not a word to Edith: he could not have borne to discuss the question even with her; but it is possible that she surmised something of it. She knew that she had only to wait, and everything would be told her. Perhaps to Bristow, who knew all the details of the case as well as he did, he might have said something as to the difficulty by which he was beset; but as it happened, Tom was not at home just then. Much of his time was spent by Lionel in long solitary walks far and wide through the country. He could think better when he was walking than when sitting quietly at home, he used to say; and, indeed, the country folk who encountered him often turned to look at him, as he stalked along, with his eyes set straight before him, gazing

on vacancy, and with lids that moved rapidly as he whispered to himself of his dreadful secret.

But, little by little, the need of counsel, of sympathy, grew more strong upon him. He was still as much at a loss as ever as to the step which he ought to take next.

"They shall decide for me," he said at last. "I will put myself into their hands. By their verdict I will abide."

General St. George at this time was away from Park Newton. As has been already stated, he had been summoned to the sick-bed of a very old and valued friend. The illness was a long and tedious one, and at the request of his friend the General stayed on, and kept him company. Truth to tell, he was by no means sorry to get away from Park Newton for awhile. Of late his position there had been anything but a pleasant one. The silent, deadly feud between his two nephews troubled him not a little. If Kester would only have gone away, then, so far, all would have been well. But having pressed him so earnestly to visit Park Newton, he could not, with any show of conscience, ask him to go till he was ready to do so of his own accord. Knowing what he knew, that Kester was all but proved to have been the murderer of Percy Osmond, he might well not care to live under the same roof with him, hiding his feelings under a mask, and, while pretending to know nothing, to be in reality cognisant of the whole dreadful story. Knowing what he knew; that Richard was none other than Lionel; and knowing the quest on which he was engaged, and that, sooner or later, the climax must come, he might well wish to be away from Park Newton when that most wretched day should dawn—a day which would prove the innocence of one nephew at the price of the other's guilt. Therefore did General St. George accept his old friend's invitation to stay with him for an indefinite length of time—till, in fact, Kester should have left Park Newton, or till the tangled knot of events should, in some other way, have unravelled itself.

When at length Lionel had decided that he would take the advice of his friends as to what his future course should be, he was obliged to await Tom Bristow's return before it was possible to do anything. Then, when Tom did get back home, the General had to be written to. When he understood what he was wanted for, he agreed to come on certain conditions. He was to come to Fern Cottage, spend one night there, and go back to his friend's house next day. No one, except those assembled at the cottage, was to know anything of his journey. Above all, it was to be kept a profound secret from Kester St. George.

Thus it fell out that on a certain April evening there were assembled in the parlour of the cottage, Edith, Mrs. Garside, General St. George, Tom Bristow, and Lionel. It was a very serious occasion, and they all felt it to be such.

The General would sit close to Edith, whom he had not seen for a

little while; and several times during the evening he took possession of one of her hands, and patted it affectionately between his ow withered palms.

"You are not looking quite so well, my dear, as when I saw you last," had been his first words after kissing her. Her cheeks were, indeed, just beginning to look in the slightest degree hollow and worn, nor did her eyes look quite so bright as of old. The wonder was, considering all that she had gone through during the last twelve months, that she looked as fair and fresh as she did. Of Mrs. Garside, whom we have not seen for some little time, it may be said that she looked plumper and more matronly than ever. But then nothing could have kept Mrs. Garside from looking plump and matronly. She was one of those people off whom the troubles and anxieties of life slip as easily as water slips off a duck's back. Although she had a copious supply of tears at command, nothing ever troubled her deeply or for long, simply because there was no depth to be troubled. She was always cheerful, because she was shallow; and she was always kind-hearted, so long as her kindness of heart did not involve any self-sacrifice on her part. "What a very pleasant person Mrs. Garside is," was the general verdict of society. And so she was—very pleasant. f her father had been hanged on a Monday for sheep stealing, by Tuesday she would have been as pleasant and cheerful as ever.

But we must not be unjust to Mrs. Garside. She had one affection, and one only; her love for Edith. During all the days of Edith's tribulation, her aunt had never deserted her—had not even thought of deserting her; and now, for Edith's sake, she had buried herself alive in Fern Cottage, where her only excitement was a little mild shopping, now and then, in Duxley High Street, under the incognito of a thick veil, or a welcome visit once and again from Miss Culpepper. Under these depressing circumstances, it ought perhaps to be put down to the credit of Mrs. Garside, rather than to her discredit, that her cheerfulness was not one whit abated, and that her face was a picture of health and content.

"I think you know why I have asked you to meet me here to-night," began Lionel. "I want your advice: I want you to tell me what step I must take next. You know what the purpose of my life has been ever since the night I escaped from prison. You know how persistently I have pursued that purpose—that I have allowed nothing to deter me or turn me aside from it. The result is that there has grown under my hands a fatal array of evidence, all tending to implicate one man—all pointing with deadly accuracy to one person, and to one only, as the murderer of Percy Osmond. I have but to open my mouth, and the four walls of a prison would shut him round as fast as ever they shut round me; I have but to speak of half I know, and that man would have to take his trial for Wilful Murder even

as I took mine. But shall I do this thing? That is the question that I want you to help me to answer. So long as the chain of evidence remained incomplete, so long as certain links were wanting to it, I felt that my task was unfinished. But at last I have all that I want. There is nothing more to search for. My task, so far, is at an end. Knowing, then, what I know, and with such proofs in my possession, am I to stop here? Am I to rest content with what I have done, and go no step farther? Or am I to go through with it to the bitter end? What that end would involve you know as well as I could tell you."

He ceased, and for a little while they all sat in silence. General St. George was the first to speak. "Lionel knows, and you all know, that from the very first he has had my heartfelt sympathy in this unhappy business. He has not had my sympathy only, he has had my help, although I have seen for a long time the point to which we were all tending, and the terrible consequences that must necessarily ensue. Me those consequences affect with peculiar force. One nephew can only be saved at the expense of the irretrievable ruin and disgrace of the other. It is not as though we had been searching in the dark, and had there found the blood-stained hand of a stranger. The hand we have so grasped is that of one of our own kin—one of ourselves; and that makes the dreadful part of the affair. Still, I would not have you misunderstand me. I am as deeply vowed to Lionel—my sympathy and help are his as much to-day—as ever; and should he choose to go through with this business in the same way as he would go through with it in the case of an utter stranger, I shall be the last man in the world to blame him. More: I will march with him side by side, whatever be the goal to which his steps may lead him. Such unparalleled wrongs as his demand unparalleled reparation. For all that, however, it is still a most serious question whether there is not a possibility of effecting some kind of a compromise: whether there is not somewhere a door of escape open by means of which we may avert a catastrophe almost too terrible even to bear thinking about."

"What is your opinion, Bristow?" said Lionel, turning to Tom. "What say you, my friend of friends?"

"I have a certain diffidence in offering any opinion," said Tom, "simply on account of the relationship of the two persons chiefly involved. To tell the world all that you know would, undoubtedly, bring about a family catastrophe of a most painful nature. It therefore seems to me that the members of that family, and they alone, should be empowered to offer an opinion on a question so delicate as the one now under consideration."

"Not so," said Lionel, emphatically. "No one could have a better right, or even so great a right, to offer an opinion as you. But for you I should not have been here to-night to ask for that opinion."

"Nor I here but for you," interrupted Tom.

"I will put my question to you in a different form," said Lionel; "and so put to you, I shall expect you to answer it in your usual clear and straightforward way. Bristow, if you were circumstanced exactly as I am now circumstanced, what would you do in my place?"

"I would go through with the task I had taken in hand, let the consequences be what they might," said Tom, without a moment's hesitation. "Nothing should hold me back. I would clear my own name and my own fame, and let punishment fall where punishment is due. You are still young, Dering, and a fair career and a happy future may still be yours, if you like to claim them."

Tom's words were very emphatic, and for a little while no one spoke. "We have yet to hear what Edith has to say," said the General. "Her interests in the matter are second only to those of Lionel."

"Yes, it is my wife's turn to speak next," said Lionel.

"What my opinion is, you know well, Lionel, and have known for a long time."

"My uncle and Bristow would like to hear it from your own lips."

"Uncle," began Edith, with a little blush, "whatever Lionel may ultimately decide to do will doubtless be for the best. The last wish I have in the world is to lead him or guide him in any way in opposition to his own convictions. But I have thought this: that it would be very terrible indeed to have to take part in a second tragedy—a tragedy that, in some of its features, would be far more dreadful than that first one, which none of us can ever forget. No one can know better than I know how grievously my husband has been sinned against. But nothing can altogether undo the wrong that has been done. Would it make my husband a happy man if, instead of being the accused, he should become the accuser? Let us for a few moments try to imagine that this second tragedy has been worked out in all its frightful consequences. That my husband has told everything. That he who is guilty has been duly punished. That Lionel's fair fame has been re-established, and that he and I are living at Park Newton as if nothing had ever happened to disturb the commonplace tenour of our lives. In such a case, would my husband be a happy man? No. I know him too well to believe it possible that he could ever be happy or contented. The image of that man—one of his own kith and kin, we must remember—would be for ever in his mind. He would be the prey of a remorse all the more bitter in that the world would hold him as without blame. But would he so hold himself? I think not—I am sure not. He would feel as if he had sought for and accepted the price of blood." Overcome by her emotion, she ceased.

"I think in a great measure as you think, my dear," said the General. "What course do you propose that your husband should adopt?"

"It is not for me to propose anything," answered Edith. "I can only suggest certain views of the question, and leave it for you and Lionel to adopt them or reject them, as may seem best to you."

"Holding the proofs of his innocence in his hands, as he does," said the General, "is it your wish that Lionel should sit down contented with what he has already achieved; and knowing that the real facts of his history is in the keeping of you and me, and two or three trusted friends, rest satisfied with that and ask for nothing more?"

"No, I hardly go so far as that," said Edith, with a faint smile. "I think that the man who committed the crime should know that Lionel still lives, and that he holds in his own hands the proof at once of his own innocence and of the other's guilt. Beyond that I say this. The world believes my husband to be dead: rather than re-open so terrible a wound, let the world continue so to believe. My husband and I can do without it, as well as it can do without us. We have our mutual love, which nothing can deprive us of; against that the shafts of fortune beat as vainly as hailstones against a castle wall. On this earth of ours are places sweet and fair without number. In one of them—not altogether dissevered from those ties of friendship which have already made our married life so beautiful—my husband and I could build up a new home, with no sad memories of the past to cling around it; and when this haunting shadow that now broods over his life has been brushed away for ever, then, I think—I know—I feel sure that I can make him happy!" Her voice, her eyes, her whole manner were imbued with a sweet fervour that it was impossible to resist.

Lionel crossed over and kissed her. "My darling!" he said, "but for your love and care I should long ago have been a madman."

"You, my dear, have put into words," said the General, "the very ideas that have for a long time been floating about, half formed, in my own mind. Lionel, what have you to say to your wife's suggestions?"

"Only this: that I have made up my mind to follow them. *He* shall know that I am alive, and that I hold in my hands the proofs of his guilt, ready to produce them at a moment's notice, should I ever be compelled to do so. Beyond that, I will leave him in peace—to such peace as his own conscience will give him. The world believes Lionel Dering to be dead and buried. Dead and buried he shall still remain, and 'requiescat in pace' be written under his name."

The General got up with tears in his eyes and shook Lionel warmly by the hand. "Good boy! good boy! you will not go without your reward," was all that he could say.

"A few weeks," said Lionel, "and the eighth of May will be here—the anniversary of poor Osmond's murder. On that day he shall be told. But I shall tell him in my own fashion. On that day, uncle, you must promise to give me your company; and you yours, Tom. After that I shall trouble you no more."

If Tom Bristow dissented from the conclusion thus come to, he said no word to that effect. There was one point, however, that struck his practical mind as having been altogether overlooked; and as soon as Edith and Mrs. Garside had left the room, he did not fail to mention it.

"What about the income of eleven thousand a year?" he said. "You are surely not going to let the whole of that slip through your fingers?"

"Ah, by-the-by, that point never struck me," said the General. "No, it would be decidedly unjust both to yourself and your wife, Lionel, to give up the income as well as the position."

"Now you are importing a mercenary tone into the affair that is utterly distasteful to me. It looks as if I were being bribed to keep silence."

"That is sheer nonsense," said the General. "You have but to hold out your hand to take the whole."

Lionel said no more, but went and sat down dejectedly on the sofa.

"You and I must settle this point between us," said the General to Tom. "It is most important. It shall be my place to see that whatever is agreed upon shall be duly carried out in the arrangement between the two men. I should think that if the income were divided it would be about as fair a thing as could be done. What say you?"

"I agree with you entirely," said Tom. "The other one will have the name and position to keep up, and that can't be done for nothing."

"Then it shall be so settled."

"There is one other point that I think ought to be settled at the same time. Who is to have Park Newton after *his* death? Lionel may have children. *He* may marry and have children. But in common justice the estate ought to be secured on Dering's eldest child, whether the present possessor die with or without an heir."

"Certainly, certainly. Good gracious me! a most valuable suggestion. Strange, now, that it never struck me. Yes, yes: Lionel's eldest child must have the estate. I will see that there is no possible mistake on that point."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HOW TOM WINS HIS WIFE.

After Mrs. McDermot's departure from Pincote, life there slipped back into its old quiet groove—into its old dull groove, which was growing duller day by day. The Squire had altogether ceased to see company: when any of his old friends called he was never at home to them; and on the score of ill health he declined every invitation that was sent to him. But it was not altogether on

account of his health that these invitations were declined, because three or four times a week he would be seen somewhere about the country roads being driven out by Jane in the basket-carriage. There was another reason for this state of things—a reason to which his friends and neighbours were not slow in giving a name. The Squire in his old age was becoming a miser: that is what the said friends and neighbours averred. But to dub him as a miser was altogether unjust: he was simply becoming penurious for his daughter's sake, as many other men are penurious for ends much more ignoble. He had, in fact, decided upon carrying out that modest scheme of domestic retrenchment of which mention has been made in a previous chapter; and the mode of living adopted by him now did undoubtedly, to many people, seem miserly in comparison with that lavish hospitality for which Pincote had heretofore been noted. The Squire knew that he could not go much into society without giving return invitations. Now, the four or five state dinners which he had been in the habit of giving every year were very elaborate and expensive affairs, and he no longer felt himself justified in keeping them up. Instead of spending so many pounds per annum in entertaining a number of people for whom he cared little or nothing, would it not be better to add the amount; trifling though it might seem; to that other trifling amount—only some few hundreds of pounds when all was told—which he had already managed to scrape together as a little nest-egg for Jane when he should be gone from her side for ever, and Pincote could no longer be her home? "If I had only died a year ago," he would sometimes say to himself, "then Jenny would have had a handsome fortune to call her own. Now she is worth only a few hundreds."

Half his journeys into Duxley now-a-days were to the bank—not to Sugden's Bank, we may be sure, but to the Town and County—and he now gloated over every five pounds added to the fund invested in his daughter's name as something more added to the nest-egg; and to be able to put away fifty pounds in a lump now afforded him far more genuine delight than the putting away of a thousand would have done six months previously.

There had been little or no conversation between Jane and her father respecting the loss of her fortune since that memorable night when the Squire himself first heard the fatal tidings, and Jane was far more anxious than he was that the topic should never be broached between then again. She guessed in part what his object might be when he began to cut down the house expenses at Pincote—discharging some half dozen of his people; raising his farm rents where it was possible to do so; letting out the whole, instead of a portion only, of the park as pasturage for sheep; selling some of his horses, and the whole of his famous cellar of wines; besides arranging for part of the produce of his kitchen garden to be taken by a greengrocer at Duxley.

She guessed, but that was all. Her father said nothing definite as to his reasons for so doing, and she made no inquiry. The sphere of his enjoyment had now become a very limited one. If it gave him pleasure—and she could not doubt that it did—to live penuriously so as to be enabled to put away a few extra pounds per annum, she would not mar the edge of that pleasure by seeming even to notice what was going on, much less make any inquiry as to its meaning. The Squire, on his part, had many a good chuckle in the solitude of his own room. "After I'm gone, she'll know what it all means," he would say to himself. "She's puzzled now—they are all puzzled. They call me a miser, do they? Let 'em call me what they like. Another twenty put away to-day. That makes——" and out would come his pass-book and his spectacles.

The fact that the Squire no longer either received company or went into society compelled Jane, in a great measure, to follow his example. There were two or three houses to which, if she chose, she could still go without its being thought strange that there was no return invitation to Pincote; and there were two or three old school friends whom she could invite to a cup of tea in her own little room without their feeling offended that they were not asked to stay to dinner. But of society, in the general sense of the term, Jane now saw little or nothing. To her this was no source of regret. Just now she was far too deeply in love to care very much for general society.

Happy was it for Jane that the only exception to her father's no-society rule was in favour of the man she loved. The Squire had by no means forgotten Mrs. McDermot's warning words, nor Tom's frank confession of his love for Jane; and it had certainly been no part of his intention to encourage Tom's visits to Pincote after the widow's abrupt departure. In honour of that departure, there had been next day a little dinner of state, at which Mr. Culpepper had made his appearance in a dress-coat and white cravat, at which there had been French side dishes, and at which the Squire had drunk Tom's health in a bumper of the very best port which his cellar contained. But when they parted that night,—when the Squire, having hobbled to the front door, shook hands with Tom and bade him good-night,—it was with a sort of half intimation that some considerable time would probably elapse before they should have the pleasure of seeing him at Pincote again. In the first flush of his delight at having got rid of his sister, the Squire thought that he could be content and happy at home of an evening with no company save that of Jane, even as he had been content and happy long before he had known Tom Bristow. But in so thinking he had over-looked one very important point. The Titus Culpepper of six months ago had been a prosperous, well-to-do gentleman, satisfied with himself and all the world, in tolerable health, and excited by the prospect of making a magnificent fortune without trouble

or anxiety; the Titus Culpepper of to-day was a broken-down gambler —a gambler who had madly speculated with his daughter's fortune, and had lost it. Broken down, too, was he in health, in spirits, and in temper; and, worst sign of all, a man who no longer found any pleasure in the company of his own thoughts, and who began to dislike to sit alone even for half an hour at a time. Of this change in himself the Squire knew and suspected nothing: how few of us do know o changes! Other people may change—nay, do we not see them changing daily around us, and smile good-naturedly as we note how querulous and hard to please poor Jones has become of late? But that we—we —should so change, becoming a burden to ourselves and a trial to those around us, with our queer cross-grained ways, our peevish, variable tempers, and our general belief that the sun shines less brightly, and that the world is less beautiful than it was a little while ago,—that is altogether impossible. The change is always in others, never in our immaculate selves.

The Squire was a man who all his life had preferred men's company to that of the opposite sex. His tastes were not at all æsthetic. He liked to talked about cattle, and crops, and the state of the markets; to talk a little about imperial politics—chiefly confined to blackguarding "the other side of the House"—and a great deal about local politics. He has been in the habit of talking by the hour together about paving and lighting, and sewage, and the state of the highways: all useful matters, without a doubt, but hardly topics calculated to interest a lady. Though he liked to have Jane play to him now and then—but never for more than ten minutes at any one time—he always designated it as "tinkling"; and as often as not, when he asked her to sing, he would say, "Now, Jenny, lass, give us a squall." But for all this, in former times Jane and he had got on very well together on the occasions when they had been without company at Pincote. He was moving about a good deal in the world at that time, mixing with various people, talking to and being talked to by different friends and acquaintances, and was at no loss for subjects to talk about, even though those subjects might not be particularly interesting to his daughter. But Jane made a capital listener, and could always give him a good commonplace answer, and that was all he craved—that and three-fourths of the talk to himself.

Of late, however, as we have already seen, the Squire, had all but given up going into society, by which means he at once dried up the source from which he had been in the habit of obtaining his conversational ideas. When he came to dine alone with Jane he found himself with nothing to talk about. Under such circumstances there was nothing left for him but grumbling. But even grumbling becomes tiresome after a time, especially when the person to whom such complainings are addressed never takes the trouble to contradict you, and is incapable of being grumbled at herself.

It was after one of these tedious evenings that the Squire said to Jane, "We may as well have Bristow up to-morrow, I think. I want to see him about one or two things, and he may as well stop for dinner. So you had better drop him a line."

The Squire had nothing of any importance to see Tom about, but he was too stubborn to own, even to himself, that it was the young man's lively company that he was secretly longing for. The weather next morning happened to be very bad, and Jane smiled demurely to herself as she noted how anxious her father was lest the rain should keep Tom from coming. Jane knew that neither rain nor anything else would keep him away. "Papa is almost as anxious to see him as I am," she said to herself. "He thinks that he can live without him, but he will find that he cannot."

Sure enough, Tom did not fail to be there. The Squire gave him a hearty greeting, and took him into the study before he had an opportunity of seeing Jane. "I've heard nothing more from those railway people about the Croft," he said. "Penfold was here yesterday and wanted to know whether he was to go on with the villas—all the foundations are now in, you know. I hardly knew what instructions to give him."

"If you were to ask me, sir," said Tom, "I should certainly say, let him begin to run up the carcases as quickly as possible. I happen to know that the company must have the Croft—that they cannot possibly do without it. They are only hanging fire awhile, hoping to get you to go to them and make them an offer, instead of their being compelled to come to you; which, in a transaction of this nature, makes all the difference."

"I don't think you are far wrong in your views," said Mr. Culpepper. "I'll turn over in my mind what you've said." Which meant that the Squire would certainly adopt Tom's advice.

"No love-making, you know, Bristow," whispered the old man, with a dig in the ribs, as they entered the dining-room.

"You may trust me, sir," said Tom.

"I'm not so sure on that score. We are none of us saints when a pretty girl is in question."

Tom did not fail to keep the Squire alive during dinner. To the old man his fund of news seemed inexhaustible. In reality, his resources in that line were never put to the test: three or four skilfully introduced topics sufficed. The Squire's own long-winded remarks, unknown to himself, filled up three-fourths of the time. Then Tom made a splendid listener. His attention never flagged. He was always ready with his "I quite agree with you, sir;" or his "Just so, sir;" or his "Those are my sentiments exactly, sir." To be able to talk for half an hour at a time to an appreciative listener on some topic that interested him strongly was a treat that the Squire thoroughly enjoyed.

After the cloth was drawn he decided that, instead of remaining by himself for half an hour, he would go with the young people to the drawing-room. He could have his snooze just as well there as in the dining-room, and he flattered himself that his presence, even though he might be asleep, would be a sufficient safeguard against any of that illicit love-making respecting which Bristow had been duly cautioned.

As a still further precaution, he had nudged Tom again, as they went into the drawing-room, and had whispered, "None of your tom-foolery, remember." Five minutes later he was fast asleep.

They could not play, or sing, or talk much, while the Squire slept, so they fell back upon chess. "There's to be no love-making, you know, Jenny," whispered Tom, across the table, with a twinkle in his eye.

"None whatever," whispered Jane back, with a little shake of the head, and a demure smile.

A mutual understanding having thus been come to, there was no need for any further conversation, except about the incident of the game, which, truth to tell, was very badly played on both sides. In place of studying the board, as a chess-player ought to do, Jane found her eyes, quite unconsciously to herself, studying the face of her opponent; while Tom's hand, wandering purposely about the board, frequently found itself taking hold of Jane's hand instead of a knight or a pawn; so that when at last the game did contrive to work itself out to an ineffective conclusion, they could hardly have said with certainty which one of them had checkmated the other. The Squire woke up, smiling and well-pleased. He had not heard them talking to each other, and there could be no harm in their playing a simple game of chess. If he were content, they had no reason to be otherwise.

After this the Squire would insist on having Tom up at Pincote as often as the latter could possibly contrive to be there. In spite of himself the old man's heart warmed imperceptibly towards Tom, and when it so happened that business took him away from home for two or three days, then the Squire grew so fretful and peevish that all Jane's tact and good temper were needed to make life at all endurable. She tried her best to persuade him to invite some of his old friends to come and see him, or go himself and call upon some of them, but in vain. Bristow he wanted, and no one but Bristow would he have. He looked upon himself as a ruined man—as a man whom it behoved to economise in every possible way. To keep company costs money. Tom Bristow was a sensible fellow, with whom it was not necessary to stand on ceremony, or be at any extra expense—a man who was content with a chop and a rice-pudding, and a glass of St. Julien. "He doesn't come here for what he gets to eat and drink. I like his society, and he likes mine. He finds that he can learn a good many things from me, and he's not above learning."

All this time the works at Knockley Holt were being pushed busily forward, much to the bewilderment and aggravation of the good people of Duxley. They were aggravated, and they considered they had a right to be aggravated, because they could not understand, and had not been told, what it was that was intended to be done there. In a small town like Duxley, no inhabitant has a right to put before his fellow-citizens a problem which they find incapable of solution, and then, when asked to solve it for them, declining to do so. Such conduct merits the severest social reprehension.

Surely, next to the madness of building a row of villas on Prior's Croft, was the puzzling folly of digging a hole in Knockley Holt. After much discussion pro and con, amongst the townspeople—chiefly over sundry glasses of whisky toddy, in sundry bar-parlours, after business hours—it seemed to be settled that Culpepper's Hole, as some wag had christened it, could be intended for nothing else than an artesian well—though what was the exact nature of an artesian well, it would have puzzled some of the Duxley wiseacres to tell; and why water should be bored for there, and to what uses it could be put when so obtained, they would have been still more at a loss to say. The Squire could not drive into Duxley without being tackled by one or another of his friends as to what he was about at Knockley Holt. But the old man would only wink and shake his head, and try to look wise, and say, "It doesn't do to blab everything now-a-days, but between you and me and the post—this is in confidence, mind—I'm digging a tunnel to the Antipodes." Then he would chuckle and give the reins a shake, and Diamond would trot off with him, leaving his questioner angry or amused, as the case might be.

It was not known to anyone in Duxley, except the Squire's lawyer, that Knockley Holt was now the property of Tom Bristow. That the works there were under Tom's direction was a well-known fact, but he was merely looked upon as Mr. Culpepper's foreman in the matter. "Gets a couple of hundred or so a year for looking after the Squire's affairs," one wiseacre would remark to another. "If not, how does he live? Seems to have nothing to do when he's not at Pincote. A poor way of getting a living. Serve him right, he should have stopped with old Hoskyns when he had the chance, and not have thought he was going to set the Thames on fire with his six thousand pounds."

No one could be possessed by a more burning desire than the Squire himself to know the meaning of the works at Knockley Holt, but having asked once, and asked in vain, his pride would not allow him to make any further inquiry. Not a day passed on which he saw Tom that he did not try, by one or two vague hints, to lead up to the subject; but when Tom turned to talk into another channel, then the old man would see that the time for him to be enlightened had not yet come.

But it did come at last, and after what was, in reality, no very long waiting. On a certain afternoon—to be precise in our dates, it was the fifth of May—Tom walked over to Pincote, in search of the Squire. He found him in his study, wearying his brain over a column of figures, which would persist in coming to a different total every time it was added up. The first thing Tom did was to take the column of figures and bring it to a correct total. This done, his next act was to produce something from his pocket that was carefully wrapped up in a piece of newspaper. He pushed the parcel across the table to the Squire. "Would you oblige me, sir," he said, "by opening that paper, and giving me your opinion as to the contents?"

"Why, bless my heart, this is neither more nor less than a lump of coal!" said the Squire, when he had opened the paper.

"Exactly so, sir. As you say, this is neither more nor less than a lump of coal. But where do you think it came from?"

"There you puzzle me. Though I don't know that it can matter to me where it came from."

"But it matters very much to you, sir. This lump of coal came from Knockley Holt."

The Squire was rather dull of comprehension. "Well, what is there so wonderful about that?" he said. "I dare say it has been stolen by some of those confounded gipsies, and left there when they moved.

"What I mean is this, sir," answered Tom, with just a shade of impatience in his tone. "This piece of coal is but a specimen of a splendid seam, which has been struck by my men at the bottom of the shaft at Knockley Holt."

The Squire stared at him, and gave a long, low whistle. "Do you mean to say that you have found a bed of coal at the bottom of the hole you have been digging at Knockley Holt?"

"That is precisely what I have found, sir, and it is precisely what I have been trying to find from the first."

"I see it all now!" said the Squire. "What a lucky young scamp you are! But what on earth put it into your head to go looking for coal at Knockley Holt?"

"I had a friend of mine, who is a very clever mining engineer, staying with me for a little while some time ago. But my friend is not only an engineer—he is a practical geologist as well. When out for a constitutional one day, we found ourselves at Knockley Holt. My friend was struck with its appearance—so different from that of the country around it, even to a different kind of vegetation on the surface. 'There is coal under here,' he said, 'and at no great distance from the surface either. Whoever is the owner ought to think himself a lucky man—that is, if he knows the value of it.' Well, sir, not content with what my friend said, I paid a heavy fee and had one of the most eminent geologists of the day down from London to examine

and report upon it. His report coincided exactly with my friend's opinion. You know the rest, sir. I came to you with a view of getting a lease of the ground, and found you desirous of selling it. I was only too glad of having the chance of buying it. I set a lot of men and a steam-engine to work without a day's delay, and that lump of coal, sir, is the happy result."

The Squire rubbed his spectacles for a moment or two without speaking. "Bristow, that's an old head of yours on those young shoulders," he said at last. "With all my heart I congratulate you on your good fortune. I know no man who deserves it more than you do. Yes, Bristow, I congratulate you, though I can't help saying that I wish that I had a friend to have told me what was told you before I let you have the ground. For want of such a friend I have lost a fortune."

"That is just what I have come to see you about, sir," said Tom, as he rose and pushed back his chair. The Squire looked up at him in surprise. "Although I bought Knockley Holt from you as a speculation, I had a pretty good idea when I bought it as to what I should find below the surface. If I had not found what I expected, my bargain would have been a dear one; but having found what I expected, it is just the opposite. In fact, sir, you have lost a fortune, and I have found one."

"I know it—I know it!" groaned the Squire, "But you needn't twit me with it."

"So far the speculation was a perfectly legitimate one, as speculations go now-a-days. But that is not the sort of thing I wish to exist between you and me. You have been very kind to me in many ways, and I have much to thank you for. I could not bear to treat you in this matter as I should treat a stranger. I could not bear to think that I was making a fortune out of a piece of ground that but a few short weeks ago was your property. The money so made would seem to me to bring a curse with it, rather than a blessing. I should feel as if nothing would ever prosper with me afterwards. Sir, I will not have this coal-mine. There are plenty of other channels open to me for making money. Here are the title-deeds of the property. I give them back to you. You shall repay me the twelve hundred pounds purchase-money, and reimburse me for the expenses I have been put to in sinking the shaft. But as for the pit itself, I will have nothing to do with it."

Tom had produced the title-deeds from his pocket, and had laid them on the table while speaking. He now pushed them across to the Squire. Then he took the deed of sale, tore it across, and threw the fragments into the grate.

It is doubtful whether Titus Culpepper had ever been more astonished in the whole course of his life than he was at the present moment. For

a little while he seemed utterly at a loss for words, but when he did speak, his words were not lacking in force.

"Bristow, you are a confounded fool!" he said, with emphasis.

"I have been told that many times before."

"You are a confounded fool—but you are a gentleman."

Tom bowed.

"You propose to give me back the title-deeds of Knockley Holt, after having found what may literally be termed a gold-mine there—eh?"

"I don't propose to do it, sir. I have done it already. There are the title-deeds," pointing to the table. "There is the deed of sale," pointing to the fire-grate.

"And do you think, sir," said the Squire, with dignity, "that Titus Culpepper is the man to accept such a romantic piece of generosity from one who is little more than a boy? Not so! It would be impossible for me to forgive myself, were I to do anything of the kind. The property is fairly and legally yours, and yours it must remain."

"It shall not, sir! By heaven! I will not have it. There are the title deeds. Do with them as you will." He buttoned his coat, and took up his hat, and turned to leave the room.

"Stop, Bristow, stop!" said the Squire, as he rose from his chair. Tom halted, with the handle of the door in his hand, but he did not go back to the table.

Mr. Culpepper walked to the window and stood there looking out for full three minutes without uttering a word. Then he turned and beckoned Tom to go to him.

"Bristow," he said, laying his hand affectionately on Tom's shoulder, "as I said before, you are a gentleman—a gentleman in mind and feeling. More than that a man cannot be, whether his family be old or new. You propose to do a certain thing which I can only accede to on one condition."

"Name it, sir," said Tom, briefly.

"I cannot take Knockley Holt from you without giving you something like an equivalent in return. Now, I only possess one thing that you would care to receive at my hands—and that is the most precious thing I have on earth. Exchange is no robbery. I will agree to take back Knockley Holt from you, if you will take in exchange for it—my daughter Jane."

"Oh! Mr. Culpepper!"

"That you love her, I know already; and I daresay the sly hussy is equally as fond of you. If such be the case, take her. I know no man who so thoroughly deserves her, or who has so much right to her as you have."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE EIGHTH OF MAY.

THE eighth of May had come round at last.

Of all days in the year this was the one that Kester St. George intended least to spend at Park Newton, but, as circumstances fell out, he could not well avoid doing so.

After the death and burial of Mother Mim—the expenses of the last named ceremony being defrayed out of Kester's pocket—it had been his intention to at once leave Park Newton for ever, as he hoped. But it so fell out that in the document purloined by him from the pocket of Skeggs when that individual lay dead on the moor, there was given the name of a certain person, still living, who could depose, of his own personal knowledge, to the truth of the facts as put down in the dying woman's confession. This person was the only witness to the facts there stated who was now alive. The name of the man in question was William Bendall, and the point that Kester had now to clear up was: Who was this William Bendall, and where was he to be found? There was no address given in the Confession, nor any hint as to the man's whereabouts; but Skeggs had doubtless known where he was to be found, and had, in fact, told Kester that he could put his hand on the man at a day's notice.

With such a sword as this hanging over his head, Kester felt that it was impossible for him to leave Park Newton. When the man should learn that Mother Mim was dead, which he probably would do in the course of a few days, and when the restraining power which had doubtless kept him silent should be removed for ever, what was to prevent him from telling all that he knew; or, at least, from giving such broad hints as to the information in his possession as might lead to inquiry—to many inquiries, perchance: to far more than Kester would care to encounter— unless he should ever be so unfortunate as to be driven to bay?

But as yet he was not driven to bay, nor anything like it. It behoved him, therefore, or so it seemed to him, to make certain cautious inquiries as to the whereabouts of Mr. William Bendall, with the view of ascertaining what kind of a man he was, or whether there was any danger to be apprehended from him. And if so, how could it best be met?

It was quite evident that it would be unadvisable for Kester to leave Park Newton while these inquiries were afoot. He might be wanted at any hour, should Mr. Bendall, when found, prove intractable; so he stayed on at the old place, very much against his will in other respects. But, to a certain extent, his patience had already been rewarded. Mr.

Bendall's address had been discovered, and Mr. Bendall himself had been found to be first cousin to Mother Mim, and railway ganger by profession. But just at this time he was away from home—his home being at Swackstone, a great centre of railway industry, about twenty miles from Duxley—he having been sent out to Russia in charge of a cargo of railway plant. He was now expected home in the course of a few days, and Kester determined not to leave the neighbourhood till he had found out for himself what manner of man he was.

We may here finally dispose of Skeggs. His body was not found till two days after Kester's visit to it. Here, too, was found his broken leg, so that the nature of the accident he had met with was clearly seen, and it was at once understood how he had come by his death. No one expect the girl Nell had seen Kester St. George in his company; so, as it fell out, that gentleman's name was never even whispered in connection with the affair.

The future of Nell had been a point that Mr. St. George had anxiously discussed in his own mind, after Mother Mim's death. What to do with such a strange girl he knew not, nor how best to secure her silence. Did she really know anything, as she owned that she did, or did she not? If anything, how much did she know, and to what use did she intend to put her knowledge? Kester had no opportunity of talking to her in private before the funeral, so he made an appointment with her for the morning following that event. She was to meet him at a certain milestone on the Duxley Road at eleven o'clock.

Kester was there to the minute; but Miss Nell was not there, nor did she come at all. Kester went back home in a fume, and after luncheon he rode over to Mother Mim's cottage without once slackening rein. There he found the old woman who had been looking after matters previously to the funeral. From her he ascertained that Nell had disappeared about two hours after her return from seeing the last of her grandmother, taking with her her new black frock and a few other things tied up in a bundle, and had given no hint as to where she was going, or whether it was her intention ever to come back.

The girl's disappearance had been a source of considerable disquietude to Kester for several days; but as time passed on without bringing any sign of her, or any information as to where she had gone, his uneasiness gradually wore itself away, till he came at last to persuade himself that, from that quarter at least, there was no possible danger to be apprehended.

But had it not been for another and a much more potent reason, Kester St. George would certainly not have spent the eighth of May at Park Newton, not even though he could not have left it till the seventh, and had been compelled to come back to it on the ninth. He would have gone somewhere — anywhere — if only for a dozen hours—if

only from sunset to sunrise, had it in any way been possible for him to do so.

But it so happened that it was not possible for him to do so. On the fifth he received a letter from his uncle, which astonished him very much. General St. George was still staying at Salisbury with his sick friend, Major Beauchamp. He wrote as under:

"All being well, I shall be back at Park Newton on the eighth instant, just for one day. I don't know whether your cousin Richard has told you that he is tired of England, and has decided upon going out to New Zealand, and he has persuaded me to go with him."

"The old fool! To think of going to New Zealand at his time of life!" muttered Kester. "Of course, it's Master Richard's dodge to take him with him, so to make sure of his money when he dies. Well, if I can only get rid of the young one, the old one may go with him, and welcome." Then he went on with his uncle's letter:

"I shall reach Park Newton on the eighth, about four P.M., when I hope to spend the evening with you. It will be my last evening at the old place, and there are several things I wish to talk to you about. We—that is, Richard and I—leave by the two o'clock train next morning direct for Gravesend, where the ship will be waiting for us. By this day next week, I shall have bidden a final farewell to dear Old England."

"So deucedly sudden. I hardly know what to make of it!" said Kester, as he folded up the letter. "I would give much if it was any other day than the eighth. I never thought to spend that day here. But there's no help for it. Well, it will be better to spend it in company than to spend it here alone. Nothing could have persuaded me to do that."

"Yes, if the old boy goes to the other side of the world, there's no chance of any of his money coming to me," he said to himself later on. "That scowling cousin of mine will come in for the lot. Poor devil! I don't suppose he's got enough of his own to pay his passage out. I wouldn't mind giving a thousand pounds myself to be rid of him for ever."

The eighth dawned at last, cold and dull as English May days so often are. Breakfast was hardly over before Kester ordered his horse, and away he started without telling anyone where he was going. He was out all day, and did not get back till five o'clock, an hour after the arrival of his uncle, with whom had come Mr. Perrins, the family lawyer. Him Kester knew of old, but had not seen for a long time. He was rather surprised to see him now, but it struck him that his uncle had probably some private arrangements to make before leaving England, in which the aid of Mr. Perrins might be required.

"This is very sudden, uncle, about your leaving England," said Kester.

"Yes, it is very sudden," replied the General. "It is not more than three weeks since Dick told me that he intended to go out. The reasons he gave me for coming to that conclusion were such that I could not blame him. I have no son of my own, and somehow, since poor Lionel left us, I seem to cling to that boy; and so it fell out that I presently made up my mind to go with him. I cannot bear the idea of living alone. I have only you and him—and you, Kester, are too much of a Bohemian, too much a citizen of the world—a wandering Arab, who strikes his tent a dozen times a year—for me ever to think of staying with you. Dick is far more of an old fogey than you are, and he and I—I don't doubt—will get on very well together."

"All the same, uncle, I shall be deucedly sorry to lose you."

Kester was destined to be still more surprised when he came down to dinner, for there he found Mr. Hoskyns and the Reverend Mr. Wharton, the octogenarian Vicar of Duxley. Mr. Hoskyns he had seen incidentally during the course of the trial, but not since. The vicar he had known from boyhood.

It was by Lionel's express desire that the two lawyers and the vicar had been invited to-day to Park Newton. What he was going to tell Kester to-night should be told to them also. They were all, in a certain sense, friends of the family; they were all men of honour; with them his secret would be safe. In simple justice to himself, he felt that it was not enough that his uncle and Bristow should be the sole depositories of that secret. There ought to be at least two or three family friends to whose custody it might be implicitly trusted, and whose good wishes and friendship would be sweet to him even in exile.

None of the three gentlemen had any suspicion as to the one particular reason why they had been invited to Park Newton: not one of them had any suspicion that Richard Dering was none other than the Lionel whom they all so sincerely mourned. They had simply been invited to a little dinner party given by General St. George on the eve of his departure from England for ever.

The last to arrive at Park Newton—and he did not arrive till two minutes before dinner was served—was Mr. Tom Bristow. He had driven Miss Culpepper from Pincote to Fern Cottage, and had stayed talking with Edith till the last minute.

Tom was an entire stranger to Kester St. George. The General introduced them to each other. Tom had seen Kester several times, knowing well who he was, but the latter had no recollection of having ever seen Tom.

Neither the General, nor Tom, nor even Edith herself, had any idea as to the particular mode which Lionel would adopt for telling his cousin that which he had made up his mind to tell him. On that point he had kept his own counsel, having spoken no word to anyone. It was a subject on which even his wife felt that she could not question

him. During the past week he had been even more silent and distrait than usual. His thoughts were evidently occupied with one subject, to the exclusion of all others. He seemed hardly to notice, or be aware of, what was going on around him. For Edith the time was a very anxious one. All the preparations for the appproaching voyage devolved upon her: that she did not mind in the least; what she prayed and longed for was that the fatal eighth might come and go in peace: might come and go without any encounter between her husband and his cousin. Lionel and Tom were to ride across from Park Newton to Fern Cottage at the close of the evening—Tom, in order that he might escort Jane back to Pincote; Lionel, because he should then have bidden the old house a last farewell, because he should then have done with the past for ever, and because he should then be ready to start with his wife for their new home on the other side of the world.

"And will nothing that any of us can say or do persuade you to reconsider your determination?" said Jane to Edith, as they sat, hand in hand, after Tom had gone forward to Park Newton. Mrs. Garside had gone into Duxley to make some final purchases, and they had the little parlour all to themselves.

"I'm afraid not," answered Edith with a melancholy smile.

"It seems so hard to lose you, just when everything is made straight and clear—just as your husband is able to prove his innocence to the world! Yes, and were I in his place I would so prove it. I would cry it aloud on the housetops, and let that other one pay the penalty which he deserves to pay. I would never banish myself from my native country for his sake; he is not worthy of such a sacrifice."

"You must not talk like that," said Edith, with a little extra squeeze of Jane's hand; "but it is easy to see who has been inoculating you with his wild doctrines."

"They are my own original sentiments, and not second-hand ones," said Jane, emphatically. "There's nothing wild about them; they are plain common sense."

"There could be no happiness for either Lionel or me were we to follow the course suggested by you. Depend upon it, Jane, that what we are about to do is best for all concerned."

"I will never believe that it is good for me to lose my friends in this way. Do you know, I feel almost tempted to go with you?"

"I wish, with all my heart, that you were going with us: but I'm afraid Mr. Culpepper is too deeply rooted in English soil to bear transplanting to a foreign clime."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Jane, with a little sigh, "only I should so like to travel: I should so like a six months' voyage to somewhere."

"The voyage is just what I dread, only it would not do to tell Lionel so."

"You might have fixed on some place a little nearer than New Zealand—some place within four or five days' journey, where one could run over for a little holiday now and then and see you. It is very ridiculous of you to go so far away."

"When you say that, dear, you forget certain peculiarities of the case. If Lionel were to settle down at any place where there would be the least possibility of his being recognized, it would necessitate a perpetual disguise. This, in a little while, would become intolerable. He must go to a place where there will be no need for him to stain his face, or dye his hair, and where he can go about freely, and without fear of detection."

"I can quite understand what an immense relief it must be to you to get away from this neighbourhood, with all its painful associations—to hide yourself in some remote valley, where no shadow of the past can darken your door; but it seems to me that you need not go quite so far away in order to do that."

"It will be all for the best, dear, depend upon it."

"No; I cannot see it. If you had only gone to America, now! No one would recognize Mr. Dering there, and it would not be too far away for me to pay you a visit once every now and again. In fact, I should make it a condition of marrying Tom, that he gave me a promise to that effect. But, New Zealand!"

As the evening wore itself on, so did Edith's uneasiness increase, but she did her best to hide it from Jane and Mrs. Garside. Lionel had told her that she must not expect him much before midnight, and up to the time of the clock striking eleven she contrived to take her share in the conversation with tolerable composure, but after that time she was unable to altogether control herself. What terrible scenes might not even then be enacting at Park Newton! To what danger might not her husband be exposed, while, only a mile away, they three were idly chatting about twenty indifferent topics! How intolerable it was to be a woman, to be condemned to inaction, to have no share in the dangers of those one loved, to be able to do nothing but wait—wait—wait! If she went to the window once she went twenty times, to listen for the sound of coming hoofs. The roads were hard and dry, and it would be possible to hear the horsemen while they were still some distance away. To and fro she paced the little room like an imprisoned leopardess. White-faced, eager-eyed, her long slender fingers clasping and unclasping themselves unceasingly, she looked like some priestess of old, who sees in her mind's eye a vision of doom—a vision of things to come, pregnant with woe unutterable. The two women watched her in silence; her mood infected them, it could not be otherwise; but there was nothing for them to do; they could only wait and listen.

"I can bear this no longer," said Edith at last; "the room suffocates

me. I must get out into the fresh air. I must go and meet Lionel." She snatched up a shawl of Mrs. Garside's, that lay on the sofa, and flung it over her head and shoulders.

"Let me go with you," cried Jane, "I am almost as anxious as you are."

"Hush! hush!" cried Edith, suddenly. "I hear them coming!"

Hardly breathing, they all listened.

"I can hear nothing but the low moaning of the wind," cried Mrs. Garside, after a few moments.

"Nor I," said Jane.

"I tell you they are coming," said Edith. "There are two of them. Listen! Surely you can hear them now!" She flung open the window as she spoke, then could be plainly heard the sound of hoofs on the hard highroad. A minute or two later the horsemen drew rein at the cottage door. Martha Vince, candle in hand, lighted them up the stairs, at the top of which the ladies stood waiting to receive them.

Very stern and very pale looked the face of Lionel Dering, as, followed by Tom Bristow, he walked slowly upstairs as a man in a dream. He was no longer disguised: face, hands, and hair were their natural colour. To see him thus sent a thrill to every heart there. To each, and all of them, he seemed like a man newly risen from the grave.

Hardly had he reached the top of the stairs before Edith's white arms were round his neck.

"My darling! what is it?" she said. "What dreadful thing has happened?" He stooped his head still lower, and whispered something in her ear. She stared up into his face for a moment, then his arms tightened suddenly round her, and they all saw that she had fainted.

At Park Newton the evening wore sleepily, slowly, and gloomily away. Tom and Mr. Hoskyns, assisted occasionally by Mr. Perrins and the vicar, did their best to keep the conversation from flagging, but at times with indifferent success. None of them could forget what day it was—could forget what took place that night twelve months ago, only a few yards from where they were sitting; and so remembering, who could wonder that the dinner seemed tasteless and the wines without flavour; that the lights seemed to burn low; and that to the imagination of more than one there a shrouded figure was with them in the room; invisible to mortal eyes, but none the less surely there; drinking when they drank, pledging a health when they pledged one, and knowing well all the time which one of the company would be the first to join it in that Land of Shadows to which it now belonged.

Kester was altogether gloomy and preoccupied, and Lionel hardly spoke at all except when spoken to. General St. George was obliged

to keep up some show of conversation, out of compliment to his guests; but no one but himself knew how irksome it was to do so. What did Lionel intend to do? Would there be a scene—a fracas—between the two cousins? What would be the end of the wretched business? How fervently he wished that the morrow was safely come, that he had seen that unhappy man's face for the last time, and that he, and Lionel, and Edith, were fairly started on their long journey to the other side of the world!

The vicar and the two men of law had naturally expected that the party would break up by ten o'clock at the latest. Not that it mattered greatly to either Perrins or Hoskyns, who were to stay at Park Newton all night. But the vicar was an old man, and anxious to get home in decent time; so that when he began to fidget and look at his watch, Lionel, who was only waiting for him to make a move, knew that it would be impossible to detain him much longer.

"I must really ask you to excuse me, General," said the old man at last; "but I see that it is past ten o'clock, and quite time for gay young sparks like me to be thinking of their nightcaps."

"I hope you are not particular to a few minutes, vicar," said Lionel. "I have ordered coffee to be served in my room, and, with my uncle's permission, we will all adjourn there."

"You must not keep me long," said the vicar.

"I will not," said Lionel. "But I know that you like to finish up your evening with a little café noir; and I have, besides, a picture which I want to show you, and which I think will interest you very much—a picture which I want to show not only to you, Mr. Wharton, but to all the other gentlemen who are here to-night."

They all rose and made a move towards the door.

"As I don't care for café noir, and don't understand pictures, you will perhaps excuse me," said Kester, ignoring Lionel, and addressing himself to his uncle.

"You had better go with us," said Lionel, turning to his cousin. "You are surely not going to be the first to break up the party."

"I don't want to break up the party. I will wait here till you come back," answered Kester, doggedly.

"You had better go with us," said Lionel, meaningly, but speaking so that the others could not hear him.

"Pray who made you dictator here?" said Kester, haughtily. "I don't choose to go with you. That is enough."

"You had better go with us," said Lionel for the third time. "If you still decline, I can only assume that you are afraid to go."

"Afraid!" sneered Kester. "Of whom and what should I be afraid?"

"That is best known to yourself."

"Anyhow, I'm neither afraid of you nor anything that you can do."

"If you decline going to my rooms, I can only conclude that you are kept away by some abject fear."

"Lead on. I'll follow. But mark my words, you and I will have this little matter out in the morning—alone."

"Willingly."

The rooms occupied by Lionel were in the opposite wing of the house to those occupied by Kester. They were, in fact, in the same wing as, and no great distance from, the room were Percy Osmond had been murdered,—a good and sufficient reason why Kester should get as far away as possible.

Lionel's sitting-room was a good-sized apartment, but it was divided into two by large folding-doors, now closed. A moderator lamp stood on the table, together with coffee, cognac, and cigars.

"Gentlemen, I must ask you to excuse me for a few minutes," said Lionel. "My picture requires a little preparation before I can show it to you." So speaking, he left the room. There was no servant. Each of the gentlemen, Kester excepted, helped himself to a cup of coffee.

Kester seated himself apart on a chair near the door. His eyes were bent on the floor. He played absently with his watch-guard. Just now, as he was coming slowly upstairs, a shadowy hand had been laid on his shoulder, a ghostly voice had whispered in his ear. It was only that one little word that he had heard whispered oft-times before. *Come,* was all the voice said, but it was followed this time, by a little malicious laugh, such as Kester had never heard before. Round his heart there was a cold, numb feeling, that was altogether strange to him; a dull singing in his ears, like the faint echo of a tide beating on some far-away shore. No one spoke to him. No one seemed to know that he was there. He felt at that moment, with an unspeakable bitterness, how utterly alone he was in the world. There was no human being anywhere who, if he were to die that moment, would really regret him—not one single creature who would drop a solitary tear over his grave. But such thoughts were miserable; they must be driven away somehow. He rose and went to the table, poured himself out half a tumbler of brandy, and drank it off without water. "It puts fresh life into me as it goes down," he muttered to himself.

He was in the act of replacing the glass on the table when a sudden noise caused all eyes to turn in one direction. The folding-doors were being unbolted from the inner side. Then they were opened till they stood about half a yard apart, but within, all as yet was in darkness. Then from out this darkness issued the voice of Lionel—or, as they all took it to be, the voice of Richard—but Lionel himself was unseen.

"Gentlemen," said the voice, "you all know what day this is. It is the eighth of May. Twelve months ago to-night, Percy Osmond

was murdered. About that crime I have often thought and often dreamed. I dreamed about it only a little while ago, and in my dream I seemed to see how the murder really took place. What I then saw in my sleep, I have painted. What I have painted I am now going to show to you."

The folding-doors were closed for a minute, and then flung wide open. The farther room was now a blaze of light. Facing this light, so that every minute detail could be plainly seen, was a large unframed canvas, on which, in colours the most vivid, was painted Lionel Dering's Dream.

The scene was Percy Osmond's bedroom, and the moment selected by the artist was where, after the brief struggle between Osmond and Kester, the latter has obtained possession of the dagger, and, while pinning Osmond down with one knee and one arm, has, with his other hand, forced the dagger deep into his opponent's heart. Peeping from behind the curtains could be seen the white, terrified face of Pierre Janvard. The figures were all life-size, and the likenesses unmistakable.

Awe-struck they crowded round the folding-doors, and gazed silently at the picture, forgetting for the moment that the man thus strongly accused was one of themselves.

"Now you see how the murder really happened—now you know who the murderer really was," said Lionel, speaking from some point in the farther room where he could not be seen. "This is no dream, but a most dread reality, that you see pictured before you. I have proofs —ample proofs—of the truth of that which I now state. The murderer of Percy Osmond stands among you. Kester St. George is that man!"

At these words, every eye was turned instinctively on Kester. He was still standing at the table where he had put down his glass. His right hand was hidden in his waistcoat. With his left hand he supported himself against the table. A strange lividity had overspread his face; his lips twitched nervously. His frightened eyes wandered from one face to another of those who were now gazing on him. He tried to speak, but could not. Then his eyes fixed themselves on the brandy. Tom interpreted the look and poured some into a glass. He drank it greedily, and then he spoke:

"What you have just been told," he said, "is nothing but a cruel, cowardly, devilish lie! Where is this man who accuses me? Why does he hide himself? He hides himself because he is a liar—because he dare not face either you or me. We all know who was the murderer—we all know that Lionel Dering ——"

"Lionel Dering is here to answer for himself. It is he who tells you to your face that you are the murderer of Percy Osmond!"

Yes, there, framed by the archway, full in the blaze of light, stood Lionel, no longer disguised—the dye washed off his face, his hands, his hair—the Lionel that they all remembered so well, come back from

the dead—his own dear self, and none but he, as they could all see at a glance, and yet looking strangely different without his long fair beard.

For a full minute Kester St. George stood as rigid as a statue, glaring across the room at the man whom he had so bitterly wronged.

One word his lips tried to form, but only half succeeded in doing so. That one word was—*Forgive.* Then a strange spasm passed across his face; he pressed his hand to his left side, and, turning suddenly half round, fell back into the arms of the man nearest to him.

"He has fainted," said the General.

"He is dead," said Tom.

"Heaven knows, I had no thought or knowledge of this," said Lionel. "None whatever!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GATHERED THREADS.

The horribly sudden death of Kester St. George, left Lionel Dering with two courses to choose between. On the one hand he could carry out his original intention of going abroad, under an assumed name, leaving the world still to believe that he was dead. On the other hand, he could give himself up to justice, under his real name, and—his first trial never having been finished, take his stand at the bar again under the original charge with the proofs he had gathered in his possession—let his innocence of the crime imputed to him work itself out through a legitimate channel to a verdict of Not Guilty. This latter course was the only one open to him, if he wished to clear himself in the eyes of the world from the stain of blood; or even if he wished to assume his own name and his position at Park Newton. But did he really wish this thing? That idea of going abroad, of burying himself and his wife in some far-away nook of the New World, had taken such hold on his imagination, that even now it had by no means lost its sweetness in his thoughts. Then, again, Kester having died without a will, if he—Lionel—were to leave himself undeclared, the estate would go to General St. George, as next of kin, and after the old soldier's time it would go, in the natural course of events, to his brother Richard. Why, then, declare himself? why give himself into custody and undergo the pain and annoyance of another term of imprisonment, and another trial—and they would be both painful and annoying, even though his innocence were proved at the end of them? Why not rather bind over to silence those few trusted friends to whom his secret was already known, and going abroad with Edith, spend the remainder of his days in happy obscurity? Why re-open that blood-stained page of family history, over which the world had of a surety gloated sufficiently already?

But in this latter view he was opposed by everybody except his wife; by his uncle, by Tom, by the vicar, and by nobody more strongly than by Messrs. Perrins and Hoskyns. The cry from all was—take your trial; let your innocence be proved, as proved it must be, and assume the name and position that are rightfully yours. Edith, with her head resting on his shoulder, only said: "Do that which seems best to you in your own heart, dearest, and that alone. Whether you go or stay, my place is by your side—my love unalterable. Only to be with you—never to lose you again—is all I ask. Give me that: I crave for nothing more."

Strange to say, the person who brought matters to a climax, and finally decided Lionel as to his future course of action, was the girl Nell, Mother Mim's plain-spoken grand-daughter. Through some channel or other she had heard of the death of Mr. St. George, and one day she marched up the steps at Park Newton, and rang the big bell, and asked, as bold as brass, to see the General. The General was one of the most accessible of men, and when told that the girl wanted to see him privately, he marched off at once to the library, and ordered her to be admitted.

It was a strange story the girl had to tell—so strange that the General at first put the girl down as a common impostor. Fortunately Mr. Perrins happened to be still at Park Newton, and he at once called the shrewd old lawyer to his assistance.

But Miss Nell was now taken with a stubborn fit, and refused either to say any more or to answer any more questions, till five pounds had been given her as an earnest of more to follow, in case her information should prove to be correct. The five pounds having been put into her hands, she told all that she knew freely enough, and answered every question that was put to her. Then she was dismissed for the time being, having first left an address where she might be found when wanted.

Nell had told them how the body of Dirty Jack had been found dead on the moor, and the first point to ascertain was, what had become of the Confession which was known to have been in his possession when he left mother Mim's cottage? Had it been found on his person? If so, where was it now? It was rather singular that Mr. St. George should be the last person known to have been seen in the company of Skeggs. The second question was, where was Mr. Bendall to be found? Mr. Perrins set to work without delay to solve this latter problem, by engaging one of Mr. Hoskyns's confidential clerks to make the requisite inquiries for him. To the first question, the whereabouts of the Confession, he determined to give his own personal attention. But, before he had an opportunity of doing this, he found among the papers of Kester the very document itself—the original Confession, duly witnessed by Skeggs and the girl Nell. A

day or two later, Mr. Bendall was also found, and—for a consideration—had no objection to tell all he knew of the affair. His evidence, and that given in the Confession, tallied exactly. There could no longer be any moral doubt as to the fact of Kester St. George having been a son of Mother Mim.

This revelation was not without its effect on the question Lionel was still debating in his own mind. It armed his uncle and Tom with one weapon more in favour of the course they were desirous that he should pursue. If Kester St. George were not Lionel's cousin, if he were not related to the family in any way, there was less reason than ever why Lionel should not declare himself, why he should not give himself up, and ler his own innocence be proved once and for ever, by proving the guilt of this other man.

Even Edith, at last, added her persuasions to those of his uncle and the others, and when this became the case Lionel could hold out no longer. Exactly a week after the death of Kester St. George (as we may as well continue to call him), Lionel Dering walked into the police-station at Duxley, and gave himself up into the hands of the sergeant on duty.

Mr. Drayton was astounded, as well he might be. "How can *you* be Mr. Dering?" he said. Lionel being now close-shaved, did not tally with the superintendent's recollection of him. "I saw that gentleman lying dead in his coffin in the church of San Michele, in Italy, and I could have sworn to him anywhere."

"What you saw, Mr. Drayton, was a cleverly-executed waxen effigy, and not the man himself. Me you did see and talk to, but without recognizing me. At all events, here I am, alive and well, and if you will kindly lock me up, I shall esteem it a favour."

"I was never so sold in the whole course of my life," said Drayton. "But there's one comfort—Sergeant Whiffins was just as much sold as I was."

At the ensuing summer assizes Lionel Dering was again put on his trial for the murder of Percy Osmond. Janvard, whose safety had been carefully looked after by a private detective in the guise of a guest at his hotel, was admitted as evidence for the Crown, and, without leaving their box, a verdict of Not Guilty was found by the jury. Never had such a scene been known in Duxley as was enacted that summer afternoon, when Lionel Dering walked down the steps of the Court-house a free man. A landau was in waiting, into which he was lifted by main force. No horses were needed, or would have been allowed. Relays of the crowd dragged the carriage all the way to Park Newton, in company with two brass bands and all the flags that the town could muster. Lionel's arm had never ached so much as it did that evening, after he had shaken hands with a great multitude of his friends—and every man and boy prided himself upon being Mr.

Dering's friend that day. As for the ladies, they had their own way of showing their sympathy with him. Half the children in the parish that came to light during the next twelve months were christened either Edith or Lionel.

The post-mortem examination showed that heart disease of long standing was the proximate cause of Kester St. George's death. He was buried, not in the family vault where the St. Georges for two centuries lay in silent state, but in the town cemetery. The grave was marked by a plain slab, on which was engraved simply the initials of the name he had always been known by, and the date of his death.

"I warned him of it long ago," said Dr. Bolus to two or three fellows at Kester's old club, as he stood with his back to the fire and his coat-tails thrown over his arms. "But whose warnings are sooner forgotten than a doctor's? By living away from London, and leading a perfectly quiet and temperate life, he might have been kept going for years. But, above all things, he should have avoided excitement of every kind."

Lionel and Edith put off for a little while their long-talked-of tour, in order that they might be present at the wedding of Tom and Jane. The ceremony took place in August: Tom and his bride went to Scotland for their honeymoon; Lionel and his wife started for Switzerland, en route for Italy, where they were to spend the ensuing winter.

Of late the Squire had recovered his health wonderfully. He seemed to have grown ten years younger in a few weeks. In the working of that wonderful coal-shaft, and in the prospect of his making a far larger fortune for his daughter than the one he so foolishly lost, he found a perpetual source of healthy excitement, which, by keeping both his mind and body actively and legitimately employed, had an undoubted tendency to lengthen his life. Besides this, Tom had asked him to superintend the construction of his new house. It was just the sort of job that the Squire delighted in—to look sharply after a lot of working men, and, while pretending that they were all in a league to cheat him, blowing them up heartily all round one half-hour, and treating them to unlimited beer the next.

"I should like to see you in the Town Council, Bristow," said the Squire one day to his son-in-law.

"Thank you, sir, all the same," said Tom, "but it's hardly good enough. There will be a general election before we are much older, when I mean, either by hook or by crook, to get into the House."

"Bristow, you have the cheek of the deuce himself," was all that the astonished Squire could say.

It may just be remarked that Tom's ambition has since been gratified. He is now, and has been for some time, member for W——.

He is clever, ambitious, and a tolerable orator, as oratory is reckoned now-a-days. What may not such a man aspire to?

Mr. Hoskyns is frequently a guest both of Tom and Lionel. Chatting with the former one day over the "walnuts and the wine," said the old man: "I have often puzzled my brain over that affair of Baldry's—that positive assertion of his that he saw and spoke to me one night in the Thornfield Road, when I was most certainly not there. Have you ever thought about it since?"

"Once or twice, I daresay, but I could have enlightened you at the time had I chosen to do so. It was I whom Baldry met. I had made myself up to resemble you, and, previously to my visit in your character, I thought I would try the effect of my disguise upon somebody who had known you well for years. As it so happened, Baldry was the first of your acquaintances whom I encountered on my nocturnal ramble. The rest you know."

"You young vagabond! And yet you have the audacity to call yourself a respectable member of society. Perhaps you can explain the mystery of the ghostly footsteps at Park Newton when poor Pearce, the butler, was frightened out of the small quantity of wit that he could lay claim to?"

"That, too, I can explain. The ghostly footsteps, as it happened, were very corporeal footsteps, being those of none other than your humble servant."

"But how did you get into the room? It had been nailed up months before."

"The nailing up was more apparent than real. The nails were sham nails. The door could be unlocked at any time, and the room entered in the ordinary way."

"But how about the cough—Mr. Osmond's peculiar cough?"

"That was an imitation by me from lessons given me by Mr. Dering. It answered the purpose admirably for which it was intended."

"To hear such sounds at midnight in a room where a man had been murdered was enough to shake the strongest nerves. I wonder you were not frightened yourself to be in the room."

"That would have been ridiculous. There was nothing to be afraid of."

"In any extraordinary circumstances I shall never believe the evidence of my own senses again," concluded Mr. Hoskyns.

Mr. Cope was not long in perceiving that he had committed a grave error of judgment in refusing Mr. Culpepper the assistance he had asked for. There would be a splendid fortune for Jane after all. It was enough to make a man tear his hair with vexation—only Mr. Cope hadn't much hair to tear—to think what a golden chance he had let slip through his fingers. Edward was recalled at once, on the slight chance that, if a meeting could anyhow be brought about between him

and Jane, the old flame might spring up with renewed ardour in the young lady's bosom, in which case she might insist upon her engagement with Edward being carried out. But Edward bore his disappointment very philosophically, and had not been three hours in Duxley before he found himself eating pastry, and being ministered to by Miss Moggs, who was still unmarried, and still as plump and smiling as ever.

Three weeks later the good people of Duxley were treated to a delightful sensation. Mr. Cope, junior, had run away with the daughter of Mr. Moggs, the confectioner; and Mr. Cope, senior, had threatened to cut his son off with the well-known metaphorical shilling.

The latest news of young Mr. Cope is, that he is living in furnished apartments in a cheap suburb of London. The late Miss Moggs, her plumpness notwithstanding, has developed into a Tartar. They have six children. Mr. Cope's income is exactly two hundred a-year, left him by his mother. His father will not give him a penny, and he is either too lazy, or too incompetent, to attempt to add to his means by a little honest work. He is very stout, and very short of breath. When he has any money he spends his time in a neighbouring billiard-room, smoking a short pipe and drinking half-and-half, and watching other men play. When he has no money he stops at home and rocks the cradle, and listens to his wife's reproaches. Mrs. Cope vows that she will buy a mangle and make her husband turn it, and try whether she cannot shame him into work that way. And all this is the result of eating pastry and being waited upon by a pretty girl.

After the trial was over, Nell, by means of some speciously-concocted tale, contrived to cozen General St. George out of twenty pounds. With this she disappeared, and was never either seen or heard of in Duxley or its neighbourhood again.

During the time that Lionel and his wife were abroad, the General went with his friend, Major Beauchamp, to Madeira, and wintered there.

It had been Lionel's intention to stay abroad for about three years. But as it fell out, he and Edith were back at Park Newton by the end of twelve months, being brought thither by the expectation of an all-important event. Lionel has not since then left home for more than a month at a time. So full of painful memories was Park Newton to him, that it was only by Edith's persuasion that he was induced to settle there at all. But years have come and gone since then, and nothing would now induce him to live anywhere else. Whatever gloomy associations might otherwise have clung to the old house have been exorcised long ago by the merry laughter of children. It was difficult at first for the Echoes of that murder-haunted roof to bring themselves to mimic the soft syllables of childhood, but when one little stranger after another came to teach them, then their voices, rusty

and creaky at first through long disuse, gradually won back to themselves a long-forgotten sweetness; and now the Echoes follow the children wherever they go, and all the grim old pile is musical with their laughter and songs and free joyous shouts of childhood. Many a time they have a bout together—the children and the Echoes—trying which of them can make the more noise; and then the children call to the Echoes and bid them come out of their hiding places and show themselves in the dusky twilight. But the Echoes only laugh back their answer, and are ever too timid to let themselves be seen.

Who, of all people in the world, should be the children's primest favourite and slave but General St. George? His heart is in the nursery, and there he spends hours every day. He "keeps shop" with them, he plays at soldiers with them, he is their horse, their roaring lion, their wild man of the woods. It is certainly amusing to see the old warrior; whose very name was once a word of terror among the lawless hill-tribes of the far east; to see him led about by one boy and by means of a piece of string tied round his arm; and while another youthful scapegrace deafens you with the noise of a drum, to watch him imitate, with dangling paws, the uncouth gracefulness of a dancing bear. There can be no doubt on one point—that the old soldier enjoys himself quite as much as the children do.

After his year's imprisonment was at an end—to which mitigated punishment Janvard was condemned, in consideration of his having acted as witness for the Crown—he and his sister went over to Switzerland, and opened an hotel there at one of the chief centres of tourist travel. There, not long ago, he was encountered by Lionel. Smirking, bowing, and rubbing his hands, Janvard went up to him, with a request that Monsieur Dering would do him the honour of stopping at the hotel. But Lionel would have nothing to do with him, and when Janvard could be made to comprehend this, his face became a study of mortification and surprise. His feelings, such as they were, were evidently hurt; he never could be made to understand why Monsieur Dering had refused so positively to take up his quarters at the Lion d'Or.

In a world that is full of fermentation and change, there are happily a few things that change not. One of these is the friendship between Lionel and Tom, which neither time nor absence, nor the growth of other interests has power to alter in the least. When they both happen to be in the Midlandshire at the same time, a week never passes without their seeing more or less of each other; and between their wives there is almost as firm a friendship as there is between them. Four people more united, more happy in each other's society, it would be impossible to find.

It was only last summer, during the long spell of hot weather, that Edith and Jane, with their youngsters, went over to Gatehouse Farm

together, for the sake of the fresh sea-breezes that seem to blow perpetually round the old house. They were sitting one day on the broad yellow sands, idling through the glowing afternoon, with their embroidery and a novel, when one of Jane's little girls happened to fall and hurt her finger. She began to cry, and Edith's little boy was by her side in a moment.

"Don't cry," he said, as he stooped and kissed her. "I will marry you when I grow to be a big man."

The little girl's tears at once ceased to flow.

The two ladies looked up. Their eyes met, and they both smiled.

"Such a thing is by no means improbable," said Edith.

"I shall not be a bit surprised if it really comes to pass," replied Jane.

THE END.

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE.

I.—The Past.

On the toilsome road that I must traverse
Ere I reach the summit of the hill,
Let me pause and backward cast my glances
O'er the valley lying green and still—
Lying low beneath me in its beauty—
The fair valley, by whose sparkling streams
I so lately wandered at my pleasure,
Almost lost in spring-time's radiant dreams.

Lost to half the music of the waters,
Though, perchance, the gladsome lullaby
Brought the dreams, and echoed through the cloudland,
Filling it with magic melody:
Lost to half the richness of the meadows,
Where the wild flowers clustered round my feet;
Yet, perchance, it was their dainty fragrance
That made all my spirit-world so sweet.

Now, the dreams dissolved, I gaze serenely
From the rugged hill-side where I stand,
Over waving woods, and smiling orchards,
Fallow fields, and verdant pastureland:
See the fairy lake among the alders,
And the cross-crowned, tap'ring village spire;
Catch the sparkle of the cottage windows,
Where the "westering" sunlight burns like fire.

But a silvery mist is slowly rising
From the purple hollows far below,
And it casts a veil of soft enchantment
Over all the gold and crimson glow:
Ev'ry harsher outline melts to vagueness;
Ev'ry ruder sight is lost to view;
And, along the tender east horizon,
Blue of earth blends with the heav'n's pure blue.

Ah, dear vale! I linger yet a moment,
Thinking of the hours now flown away;
Thinking, too, of how the distant future
Once looked fairer than the past to-day:
Then this hill-side seemed a lofty mountain
Region of unclouded blessedness;
Now I turn and gaze about my footpath,
Sighing at its barren dreariness.

II.—The Present.

Barren! Do not all these graceful fern fronds,
All this wealth of purple heather-bloom,
All these milk-white cups of grass Parnassus,
Mock the word, and chase away my gloom?
Shall I miss, in vain regrets, the treasures
Thickly strewn about my upward way;
As I erewhile missed, in fleeting visions,
Half the sweets that in the valley lay?

Surely *no*. My spirit rises blithely
As I pluck each smallest wayside flower;
Feast my eyes upon its painted petal;
Seize the passing pleasures of the hour;
Breathe the wholesome air of these high moorlands,
Tempered by the genial August heat;
Watch the jewelled dragon-fly flash past me,
And the burnished beetle at my feet.

Catch, too, when with earnest ear I listen,
A low murmur as of distant seas;
Even feel, in turning some sharp headland,
The strange freshness of the ocean breeze:
Oh, that ocean! towards the which I travel,
Do I fear or long to reach its shore;
And to launch upon its unknown waters,
Thence to be my home for evermore?

Perhaps the fear is greater than the longing;
Yet if I were told that I must stay
Still upon this mossy tract of upland—
Never reach the waters of the bay;
Ay, though I had leave to wander backward—
To retrace my path into the dale;
All the prospect round would seem to narrow;
All the glowing lights and tints to pale.

So I let the phantom of the future
Keep the present fresh, and bright, and clear;
And I climb with firmer will and foot-tread,
Up the hill-side, longing or in fear.
And, my sweeping downs, I learn to love you
Almost better than the sheltered plain;
Fuller life is yours, and wider vision,
Keener joy, if also keener pain.

III.—The Future.

Now I stand upon the highest hill-top;
Strain my eyes to catch a first far view
Of the awful ocean, lying silent
'Neath a canopy of deepest blue;
For the sun has set, and all the splendour
Of his coloured robes is lost to sight;
And the sky, though free from cloud or vapour,
Takes the shadows of the gath'ring night.

Through the shadows shall I catch the glimmer
Of the boundless waters far away?
Must my downward course be dark and cheerless;
Will no star send out a kindly ray?
See! the moon is rising in her glory,
Cold and bright, and oh! divinely fair,
And her light shines on the sea's smooth surface,
Like an answer to my voiceless prayer.

Ev'ry nearer point she tips with silver,
Beauteous as the sun's broad blaze of gold;
And the tranquil radiance soothes my spirit—
Wraps it round with soft, caressing fold.
By the friendly light I fear no longer
To descend unto the level shore:
There to wait until I hear the splashing
Of my magic bark's advancing oar.

For the future now lies calm before me—
Calm and solemn, far as eye can reach;
And the snow-clad moors slope gently downward,
Till they touch the shingles on the beach.
On the beach the glitt'ring wavelets ripple,
With a voice of low monotony;
And they whisper secrets of the ocean—
Seem to bound the dread Infinity!

Stay, descending steps! the shadows deepen:
Earth is hid; I only see the light
Resting on the farthest ridge of waters,
In a mystic sheet of dazzling white.
Hark! is it the wind among the brambles;
Or the surf which breaks upon the shore?
Courage, fainting heart! I know the token;
'Tis the dip of an advancing oar.

Emma Rhodes.

THE OTHER EAR-RING.

"AND if I could make sure that you two boys would behave yourselves and give me no trouble, perhaps I might take you this year, just for a treat."

"Behave ourselves!" exclaimed Tod, indignantly resentful. "Do you take us for two children, sir?"

"We would be as good as gold, sir," I added, turning eagerly to the Squire.

"Well, Johnny, I'm not much afraid but that you would. Perhaps I'll trust you both, then, Joe."

"Thank you, father."

"I shall see," added the Pater, thinking it well to put in a little qualification. "It 's not quite a promise, mind. But it is two or three years now, I think, since you went to them."

"It seems like six," said Tod. "I know it 's four."

We were talking of Worcester Races. At that period they used to take place early in August. Dr. Frost had an unpleasant habit of reassembling his pupils either the same week or the previous one; and to get over to the races was nearly as difficult for Tod and for me as though they had been run in California. To hear the Pater say he might perhaps take us this year, just as the Midsummer holidays were drawing to an end, and say it voluntarily, was as good as it was unexpected. He meant it, too; in spite of the added reservation: and Dr. Frost was warned that he need not expect us until the race week was at its close.

The Squire drove into Worcester on the Monday, to be ready for the races on Tuesday morning, with Tod, myself, and the groom—Giles; and put up, as usual, at the Star-and-Garter. Sometimes he only drove in and back on each of the three race days; or perhaps on two o them: this he could do very well from Crabb Cot, but it was a good pull for the horses from Dyke Manor. This year, to our intense gratification, he meant to stay in the town.

The Faithful City was already in a bustle. It had put on its best appearance, and had its windows cleaned: some of the shop-fronts were being polished off as we drove slowly up the streets. Families were, like ourselves, coming in: more would come before night. The theatre was open, and we went to it after dinner; and saw, I remember, Guy Mannering (over which the Pater went to sleep), and an after-piece with a ghost in it.

The next morning I took the nearest way from the hotel to Sansome

Walk, and went up it to call on one of our fellows who lived near the top. His friends always let him stay at home for the race week. A servant-maid came running to answer my knock at the door.

"Is Harry Parker at home?"

"No, sir," answered the girl; who seemed to be cleaning up for the races on her own account, for her face and arms were all coaly. "Master Harry have gone down to Pitchcroft, I think."

"I hope he has gone early enough!" said I, feeling disappointed. "Why, the races won't begin for hours yet."

"Well, sir," she said, "I suppose there's a deal more life to be seen there than here, though it is early in the day."

That might easily be. For of all solitary places Sansome Walk was, in those days, the dreariest, especially portions of it. What with the overhanging horse-chestnut trees, and the high dead wall behind those on the one hand, and the flat stretch of lonely fields on the other, Sansome Walk was what Harry Parker used to call a caution. You might pass through all its long length from end to end and never meet a soul.

Taking that narrow by-way on my way back that leads into the Tything by St. Oswald's Chapel, and whistling a bar of the sweet song I had heard at the theatre overnight, "There's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream," somebody came swiftly advancing down the same narrow path, and I prepared to back sideways to let her pass, —a young woman with a large shabby shawl on, and the remains of faded gentility about her.

It was Lucy Bird! As she drew near, lifting her sad sweet eyes to mine with a mournful smile, my heart gave a great throb of pity. Faded, worn, anxious, reduced!—oh, how unlike she was, poor girl, to the once gay and charming Lucy Ashton!"

"Why, Lucy! I did not expect to see you in Worcester! We heard you had left it months ago."

"Yes, we left last February for London," she answered. "Captain Bird has only come down for the races."

As she took her hand from underneath her shawl to respond to mine, I saw that she was carrying some cheese and a paper of cold cooked meat. She must have been buying the meat at the cook's shop, as the Worcester people called it, which was in the middle of High Street. Oh! what a change, what a change for the delicately-bred Lucy Ashton! Better that her Master of Ravenswood had buried his horse and himself in the flooded land, as the other one did, than have brought her to this.

"Where are you going to, down this dismal place, Lucy?"

"Home," she answered. "We have taken lodgings at the top of Sansome Walk."

"At one of those cottages a little beyond it?"

"Yes, at one of those. How are you all, Johnny? How is Mrs. Todhetley?"

"Oh, she's blooming."

"Is she at Worcester?"

"No, at Dyke Manor. She would not come. The Squire drove us in yesterday. We are at the Star."

"Ah! yes," she said, her eyes taking a dreamy, far-off look. "I remember staying at the Star myself one race week. Papa brought me. It was the year I left school."

How things were altered with her! Carrying home papers of cheese and cooked meat!

"Have you heard or seen anything of my brothers lately, Johnny Ludlow?"

"Not since we were last staying at Crabb Cot. We went to Timberdale Church one day and heard your brother Charles preach; and we dined once with Robert at the Court, and he and his wife came once to dine with us. But—have you not seen your brother James?"

"No—and I would rather not see him. He would be sure to ask me painful questions."

"But he is always about the streets here, seeing after his patients, Lucy. I wonder you have not met."

"We only came down last Saturday: and I go out as little as I can," she said, a kind of evasiveness—or rather, perhaps, hesitation—in her tone and manner that struck me. I did think I saw James's carriage before me just now as I came up the Tything. It turned into Britannia Square."

"I daresay. We met it yesterday in Sidbury as we drove in."

"His practice gets large, I suppose. You say Charles was preaching at Timberdale?" she added: "was Herbert Tanerton ill?"

"Yes. Ailing, that is. Your brother came over to take the duty for him. Will you call at the Star and see the Squire, Lucy? You know how pleased he would be."

"N—o," she answered, her manner still more hesitating, just as though she were in a peck of inward doubt; and she seemed to be debating some matter mentally. "I—I would have come after dark, had Mrs. Todhetley been there. At least I think I would—I don't know."

"You can come all the same, Lucy."

"But no—that would not have done," she went on to herself, in a half whisper. "I might have been seen. It would never have done to risk it. The truth is, Johnny, I ought to see Mrs. Todhetley on a matter of business. Though even if she were here, I do not know that I might dare to see her. It is—not exactly my own business—and —and mischief might come of it."

"Is it anything I can say to her for you?"

"I—think—you might," she returned slowly, pausing, as before, between her words. "I know you are to be trusted, Johnny."

"That I am. I'd not forget a single item of the message."

"I did not mean in that way. I shall have to entrust to you a private matter; a disagreeable secret. It is a long, long while that I have wanted to tell some of you; ever since last winter: and yet, now that the opportunity has come that I may do it, I scarcely dare. The Squire is hasty and impulsive, his son is proud; but I think I may confide in you, Johnny."

"Only try me, Lucy."

"Well, I will. *I will.* I know you are true as steel. Not this morning, for I cannot stop—and I am not prepared. Let me see Where shall we meet again? No, no, Johnny, I cannot venture to the hotel: it is of no use to suggest that."

"Shall I come to your lodgings?"

She just shook her head by way of dissent, and remained in silent thought. I could not imagine what it was she had to tell me that required all this preparation: but it came into my mind to be glad that I had chanced to go that morning to Harry Parker's.

"Suppose you meet me in Sansome Walk this afternoon, Johnny Ludlow? Say at"—considering—"yes, at four o'clock. That will be a safe hour, for they will be on the racecourse and out of the way. People will, I mean," she added, hastily: but somehow I did not think she had meant people. "Can you come?"

"I will manage it."

"And, if you don't meet me at that time—it is just possible that I may be prevented coming out—I will be there at eight o'clock this evening instead," she continued. "That I know I can do."

"Very well. I'll be sure to be there."

Hardly waiting another minute to say good morning, she went swiftly on. I began wondering what excuse I could make for leaving the Squire's carriage in the midst of the sport, and whether he would let me leave it.

"But the way for that was paved without any effort of mine. At the early lunch, the Squire, in the openness of his heart, offered a seat in the phaeton to some old acquaintance from Martley. Which of course would involve Tod's sitting behind with me, and Giles's being left out altogether.

"Catch me at it!" cried Tod. "You can do as you please, Johnny: I shall walk."

"I will walk too," I said—though you of course understand that I had never expected to sit elsewhere than behind. And I knew it would be easier for me to lose Tod in the crowd, and so get away to keep the appointment, than it would have been to elude the Squire's questioning as to why I could want to get out of the carriage.

Lunch over, Tod said he would go to the Bell, to see whether the Letsoms had come in; and we started off. No; the waiter had seen nothing of them. Onwards, down Broad Street we went, took the Quai, and so got on that way to Pitchcroft—as the racecourse is called. The booths and shows were at this end, and the chief part of the crowd. Before us lay stretched the long expanse of the course, green and level as a bowling-green. The grand-stand (comparatively speaking a new erection there) lay on the left, higher up, the winning-chair and distance-post facing it. Behind the stand, flanking all that side of Pitchcroft, the beautiful river Severn flowed along between its green banks, the houses of Henwick opposite looking down upon it from their great height, over their sloping gardens. It was a hot day, the blue sky dark and cloudless.

"True and correct card of all the running horses, gentlemen: the names, weights, and colours o' the riders!" The shouted-out words, echoing on all sides from the men who held these cards for sale, are repeated in my brain now; as are other sounds and sights. I was somewhat older then than I had been; but it was not so very long since those shows, ranged around there side by side, a long line of them, held the greatest attraction for me in life. Guy Mannering, the past night, had been very nice to see, very enjoyable; but it possessed not the nameless charm of that first "play" I went to in Scowton's Show on the racecourse. *That* charm could never come again. And I was but a lad yet.

The lightning with which the play opened was real lightning to me; the thunder real thunder. The gentleman who stood, when the curtain rose, gorgeously attired in a scarlet doublet, slashed with gold (something between a king and a bandit), with uplifted face of terror and drawn sword, calling the war of the elements "tremendious," was to me a greater potentate than nearly the world could contain! The young lady, his daughter, in ringlets and spangles, who came flying on in the midst of it, and fell at his feet with upraised arms and a piteous appeal, "Alas! my father, and will you not consent to my marriage with Alphonso?" seemed more lovely to me than the Sultanas in the Arabian Nights, or the Princesses in Fairyland. I sat there entranced and speechless. A new world had opened to me—a world of delight. For weeks and weeks afterwards, that play, with its wondrous beauties, its shifting scenes, was present to me sleeping and waking.

The ladies in spangles, the gentlemen in slashed doublets, were on the platforms of their respective shows to-day, dancing for the benefit of Pitchcroft. Now and again a set would leave off, the music ceasing also, to announce that the performance was about to commence. I am not sure but I should have gone up to see one, but for the presence of Tod and Harry Parker—whom we had met on the course. There were learned pigs, and spotted calves, and striped zebras; and ginger-

bread and cake stalls; and boat-swings and merry-go-rounds—which had made me frightfully sick once when Hannah let me go in one. And there was the ever-increasing throng, augmenting incessantly; carriages, horsemen, shoals of foot passengers; conjurers and fortune-tellers; small tables for the game of "thimble-rig," their owners looking out very sharply for the constables who might chance to be looking for *them;* and the movable exhibitions of dancing dolls and Punch and Judy. Ay, the sounds and the sights are in my brain now. The bands of the different shows, mostly attired in scarlet and gold, all blowing and drumming as hard as they could drum and blow; the shouted-out invitations to the admiring spectators, "Walk up, ladies and gentlemen, the performance is just a-going to begin;" the scraping of the blind fiddlers; the screeching of the ballad singers; the sudden uproar as a stray dog, seen crossing the course, is hunted off; the incessant jabber and the Babel of tongues; and the soft roll of wheels on the turf.

Hark! The bell rings for the clearing of the course. People know what it means, and those who are cautious hasten at once to escape under the cords on either side. The gallop of a horse is heard, its rider, in his red coat and white smalls, loudly smacking his whip to clear it. The first race is about to begin. All the world presses towards the environs of the grand-stand to get a sight of the several horses entered for it. Here they come; the jockeys in their distinguishing colours, trying their horses in a brisk canter, after having been weighed in the paddock. A few minutes, and the start is effected: they are off!

It is only a two-mile heat. The carriages are all drawn up against the cords; the foot-passengers press it; horsemen get where they can. And now the excitement is at its height; the rush of the racers coming in to the winning-post breaks on the ear. They fly like the wind.

At that moment I caught sight of the sharply-eager face of a good-looking, dashing man, got up to perfection: you might have taken him for a lord, at least. Arm-in-arm with him stood another, well-got-up also, as a sporting country gentleman: he wore a green cut-away coat, top-boots, and a broad-brimmed hat which shaded his face. If I say "got up," it is because I knew the one, and I fancied I did the other. But the latter's face was partly turned from me, and hidden, as I have said, by the hat. Both watched the swiftly-coming race-horses with ill-concealed anxiety: and both, as well-got-up gentlemen at ease, strove to appear indifferent.

"Tod, there's Captain Bird."

"Captain Bird! Where! You are always fancying things, Johnny."

"A few yards lower down. Close to the cords."

"Oh, be shot to the scoundrel, and so it is! What a swell! Don't bother. Here they come."

"Blue cap wins!" "No; red sleeves gains on him!" "Yellow stripes is first!" "Pink jacket has it!" "By Jove! the bay colt is distanced!" "Purple wins by a neck!"

With the hubbub of these called-out different versions from the bystanders echoing on our ears, the horses flew past in a rush and a whirl. Black cap and white jacket was the winner.

Amid the crowding and the pushing and the excitement that ensued, I tried to get nearer to Captain Bird. Not to see *him:* it was impossible to look at him with any patience, and contrast his dashing appearance with that of poor, faded Lucy's: but to see the other man. For he put me in mind of the gentleman-detective, Eccles, who had loomed upon us at Crab Cot that Sunday afternoon in the past winter, polished off the surloin of beef, crammed the Squire with anecdotes of his college life, and finally made off with the other ear-ring.

If you read the paper called Mrs. Todhetley's Ear-rings, the circumstances may easily be recalled. She lost an ear-ring out of her ear: a beautiful ear-ring of pink topaz encircled with diamonds. It was supposed a tramp had picked it up; and the Squire went about it to the police at Worcester. On the following Sunday a gentleman called introducing himself as Mr. Eccles, a private detective connected with the said police, from whom he purported to come. The Squire was marvellously taken with him, ordered in the beef, not long gone out from the dinner, and was eager to entrust the ear-ring to him (which he asked to be allowed to borrow for the purpose of comparing it with the lost one, to which he said a clue had been obtained), as he was to take it. That Eccles had been a gentleman once—at least, that he had mixed with gentlemen, was easy to be seen: and perhaps had also been an Oxford man, as he asserted; but he was certainly a swindler now. He carried off the ear-ring; and we had never seen him, or it, from that day to this. But I did think I saw him now on the racecourse. In the side face, and the tall, well-shaped figure of the top-booted country gentlemen with the heavy bunch of seals hanging to his watch-chain, who leaned on that man Captain Bird's arm, there was a great resemblance to him. The other ear-ring, lost first, was found in the garden under a small fir-tree when the snow melted away; where it must have dropped unseen from Mrs. Todhetley's ear, as she stopped in the path to shake the snow from the tree.

But the rush of people, sweeping by, was too great. Captain Bird and he were nowhere to be seen. In the confusion also I lost Tod and Harry Parker. The country gentleman I meant to find if I could, and went about looking for him.

The carriages were coming away from their standing places near the ropes to drive about the course, as was the custom in those days. Such a thing as taking the horses out of a carriage and letting it stay where it was until the end of the day, was not known on Worcester racecourse.

You might count the carriages-and-four there then, their inmates exchanging greetings with each other in passing, as they drove to and fro. It was a sight to see the noblemen's turn-outs; the glittering harness, the array of servants in their sumptuous liveries; for they came in style to the races. The meeting on the course was the chief local event of the year, when all the county assembled to see each other and look their best.

"Will you get up now, Johnny?"

The soft bowling of the Squire's carriage-wheels arrested itself, as he drew up to speak to me. The Martley old gentleman sat with him, and there was a vacant place by Giles behind.

"No thank you, sir. I would rather be on foot."

"As you will, lad. Is your watch safe?"

"Oh, yes."

"Where's Joe?"

"Somewhere about. He is with Harry Parker. I have only just missed them."

"Missed them! Oh, and I suppose you are looking for them. A capital race, that last."

"Yes, sir."

"Mind you take care of yourself, Johnny," he called back, as he touched up Bob and Blister, to drive on. I generally did take care of myself, but the Squire never forgot to remind me to do it.

The afternoon went on, and my search with it in the intervals of the racing. I could see nothing of those I wanted to see, or of Tod and Harry Parker. Our meeting, or not meeting, was just a chance, amid those crowds and crowds of human beings, constantly moving. Three o'clock had struck; and as soon as the next race should be over—a four-mile heat—it would be nearly time to think about keeping my appointment with Lucy Bird.

And now once more set in all the excitement of the running. A good field started for the four mile heat, more horses than had run yet.

I liked those four-mile heats on Worcester racecourse: when we watched the jockeys in their gay and varied colours describing the figure of eight, and coming in, hot and panting, at the end. The favourites this time were two horses named "Swallower and "Master Ben." Each horse was well liked: and some betters backed one, some the other. Now they are off!

The running began, slow and steady; the two favourites just ahead; a black horse (I forget his name, but his jockey wore crimson and purple) hanging on to them; most of the other horses lying outside. The two kept together all the way, and as they came in for the final run the excitement was intense.

"Swallower has it by a neck!" "No, Master Ben heads him!" 'Ben wins; Swallower loses!" "Swallower has it; Ben's jockey is

dead beat!" and so on, and so on. Amid the shouts and the commotion the result was announced——a dead heat.

So the race must be run again. I looked at my watch (which you may be sure I had kept carefully buttoned up under my jacket), wondering whether I could stay for it. That was uncertain; there was no knowing how long an interval would be allowed for breathing-time.

Suddenly there arose a frightful commotion above all the natural commotion of the course. People rushed towards one point; horsemen galloped thither, carriages bowled cautiously in their wake. The centre of attraction appeared to be on the banks of the river, just beyond the grand-stand. What was it? What had occurred? The yells were deafening; the pushing fearful. At last the cause was known: King Mob was ducking some offender in the Severn.

To get near, so as to see anything of the fun, was impossible: it was equally impossible to gather what he had done; whether picked a pocket, or cheated at betting. Those are the two offences that on Pitchcroft were then deemed deserving of the water. This time, I think, it was connected with betting.

Soon the yells became louder and nearer. Execrations filled the air. The crowd opened, and a wretched looking individual emerged out of it on the hard run, his clothes dripping water, his lank hair hanging about his face like the slim tails of so many rats.

On he came, the mob shouting and hallooing in his wake, and brushed close past me. Why! it was surely the country gentleman I had seen with Bird! I knew him again at once. But whether it was the man Eccles or not, I did not see: he tore by swiftly, his head kept down. A broad-brimmed hat came flying after him, propelled by the feet of the crowd. He stooped to catch it up, and then kept on his way right across the course, no doubt to make his escape from it. Yes, it was the same man in his top-boots. I was sure of that. Scampering close to his heels, fretting and yelling furiously, was a half-starved white dog with a tin kettle tied to his tail. I wondered which of the two was the more frightened—the dog or the man.

And standing very nearly close to me, as I saw then, Captain was Bird. Not running, not shouting; simply looking on with a countenance of supreme indifference, that seemed to express no end of languid contempt of the fun. Not a sign of recognition crossed his face as the half-drowned wight swept past him: nobody could have supposed he ever set eyes on him before. And when the surging crowd had passed, he sauntered away in the direction of the saddling-place.

But I lost the race. Though I stayed a little late, hoping to at last see the horses come out for the second start, and how many of the former field would compete for it, the minutes flew all too swiftly by, and I had to go, and to put the steam on. Making a bolt across Pitchcroft and up Salt Lane, went I, full split, over the Tything slantwise,

and so down to Sansome Walk. St. Oswald's clock was tinkling out four as I reached it.

Lucy did not come. She had indicated the spot where the meeting should be; and I waited there, making the best I could of it; cooling myself, and looking out for her. At half-past four I gave her up in my own mind; and when five o'clock struck, I knew it was useless to stay longer. So I began to take my way back slower than I had come; and on turning out by St. Oswald's, I saw the carriages and people flocking up on their way from Pitchcroft. The day's racing was over.

There was a crowd at the top of Salt Lane, and I had to wait before I could get across. In the wake of a carriage-and-four that was turning out of it, came Captain Bird, not a feather of his plumage ruffled, not a speck (save dust) on his superfine coat, not a wristband soiled. He had not been ducked, if his friend had.

"How d'ye do, Master Ludlow?" said he, with a grandly patronising air, and a flourish of his cane, as if it were a condescension to notice me. And I answered him civilly; though he must have been aware I knew what a scamp he was.

"I wish he'd steal away to America some moonlight night," ran my thoughts, "and leave poor Lucy in peace."

The Squire's carriage dashed up to the hotel as I reached it, Tod sitting behind with Giles. I asked which of the two horses had won. Swallower: won by half a neck. The Squire was in a glow of satisfaction, boasting of the well-contested race.

And now, to make things intelligible, I must refer again for a minute or two to that past paper. It may be remembered that when "Detective Eccles" called on us that Sunday afternoon, asking to look at the fellow ear-ring to the one lost, Mrs. Todhetley had gone in to the Coneys', and the Squire sent me for her. When I got there, Lucy Bird was in the drawing-room alone, the Mater being upstairs with Mrs. Coney. Poor Lucy told me she had been spending a day or two at Timberdale Court (her happy childhood's home), and had come over to dine with Mr. and Mrs. Coney, who were always kind to her, she added with a sobbing sigh; but she was going back to Worcester by the next train. I told her what I had come for—the detective's visit and his request to see the other ear-ring. Mrs. Todhetley felt nervous at meeting a real live detective, and asked me no end of questions as to what this particular one was like. I said he was no tiger to be afraid of, and described him as well as I could: a tall, slender, gentlemanly man, well-dressed; gold studs, a ring on his finger, a blue necktie, and a black moustache. Lucy (I had noticed it at the time) seemed struck with the description; but she made no remark. Before we turned in at our gate we saw her leave the Coneys' house, and come stepping through the snow on her way to the station. Since then, until now we had not seen anything of Lucy Bird.

The stars flickered through the trees in Sansome Walk as I turned into it. A fine trouble I had had to come! Some entertainment was in full fling that evening at the Saracen's Head—a kind of circus, combined with rope-dancing. Worcester would be filled with shows during the race week (I don't mean those on Pitchcroft), and we went to as many as we could get money for. We had made the bargain with Harry Parker on the course to go to this one and during the crowded dinner Tod asked the Squire's leave. He gave it with the usual injunction to take care of ourselves, and on condition that we left our watches at home. So, there I was, in a fix; neither daring to say I could not go, nor daring to say what prevented it, for Lucy had bound me to secrecy.

"What time is this thing going to be over to night, Joe?" had questioned the Squire, who was drinking port wine with some more old gentlemen at one end of the table, as we rose to go.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Tod. "About ten o'clock, I dare say."

"Well, mind you come straight home, you two. I won't have you getting into mischief. Do you hear, Johnny?"

"What mischief do you suppose, sir, we are likely to get into?" fired Tod.

"*I* don't know," answered the Squire. "When I was a young lad —younger than you—staying here at the races with my father, I remember we were so wicked one night as to go about ringing and knocking at all the doors ——"

"You and your father, sir?" asked Tod, innocently.

"My father! no!" roared the Squire. "What do you mean, Joe? How dare you? My father go about the town knocking at doors and ringing at bells! How dare you suggest such an idea? We left my father, sir, at the hotel with his friends at their wine, as you are leaving me with my friends here. It was I and half-a-dozen other young rascals who did it—more shame for us. I can't be sure how many bell-wires we broke. The world has grown wiser since then, though I don't think it's better; and—and mind you walk quietly home. Don't get into a fight, or quarrel, or anything of that kind. The streets are sure to be full of rough people and pickpockets."

Harry Parker was waiting for us in the hotel gateway. He said he feared we should be late, and thought we must have been eating dinner for a week by the time we took over it.

"I'm not coming with you, Tod," I said; "I'll join you presently."

"Tod turned round and faced me. "What on earth's that for, Johnny?"

"Oh, nothing. I'll come soon. You two go on."

"Suppose you don't get a place!" cried Parker to me.

"Oh, I shall get one fast enough: it won't be so crowded as all that."

"Now look here, lad," said Tod, with his face of resolution, "you are up to some dodge. What is it?"

"My head aches badly," I said—and that was true. "I can't go into that hot place until I have had a spell of fresh air. But I will be sure to join you later, if I can."

My headaches were always allowed. I had them rather often. Not the splitting, roaring pain that Tod would get in his head on rare occasions, once a twelvemonth, or so, when anything greatly worried him; but bad enough in all conscience. He said no more; and set off with Harry Parker up the street towards the Saracen's Head.

The stars were flickering through the trees in Sansome Walk, looking as bright as they do on a frosty night in winter. It was cool and pleasant: the great heat of the day—which must have given me my headache—had passed. Mrs. Bird was already at the spot. She drew me underneath the trees on the side, looking up the walk as though she feared she had been followed. A burst of distant music crashed out and was borne towards us on the air: the circus band, at the Saracen's Head. Lucy still glanced back the way she had come.

"Are you afraid of anything, Lucy?"

"There is no danger, I believe," she answered; "but I cannot help being timid: for, if it were known what I am doing, I—I—I don't know what they would do to me."

"You did not come this afternoon."

"No. I was very sorry, but I could not," she said, as we paced slowly about, side by side. "I had my shawl and bonnet on to come, when Edwards came in—a friend of my husband's, who is staying with him. He had somehow got into the Severn, and looked quite an object, his hair and clothes dripping wet, and his forehead bruised."

"Why, Lucy, he was ducked!" I cried excitedly. "I saw it all. That is, I saw the row; and I saw him when he made his escape across Pitchcroft. He had on a smart green cut-away coat, and top-boots."

"Yes, yes," she said; "I was sure it was something of that kind. When my husband came home later they were talking together in an undertone, Edwards cursing some betting-man, and Captain Bird telling Edwards that it was his own fault for not being more cautious. However, I could not come out, Johnny, though I knew you were waiting for me. Edwards asked, as impertinently as he dared, where I was off to. To buy some tea, I answered, but that it did not matter particularly, as I had enough for the evening. They think I have come out to buy it now."

"Do you mean to say, Lucy, that Captain Bird denies you free liberty?—watches you as a cat does a mouse?"

"No, no; you must not take up wrong notions of my husband, Johnny

Ludlow. Bad though the estimation in which he is held by most people is, he has never been really unkind to me. Trouble, frightful trouble he does bring upon me, for I am his wife and have to share it, but personally unkind to me he has never yet been."

"Well, I should think it unkind in your place, if I could not go out when I pleased, without being questioned. What do they suspect you would be after?"

"It is not Captain Bird; it is Edwards. As to what he suspects, I am sure he does not know himself; but he seems to be generally suspicious of every one, and he sees I do not like him. I suppose he lives in general fear of being denounced to the police, for he is always doing what he calls 'shady' things; but he must know that he is safe with us. I heard him say to my husband the day before we left London, 'Why do you take your wife down.' Perhaps he thinks my brothers might be coming to call on me, and of course he does not want attention drawn to the place he may chance to be located in, whether here or elsewhere."

"What is his name, Lucy?"

"His name? Edwards."

"It 's not Eccles, is it?"

She glanced quickly round at me as we walked, searching my face in the dusk.

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because, when I first saw him to-day on the racecourse with Captain Bird, he put me in mind of the fine gentleman who came to us that Sunday at Crabb Cot, calling himself Detective Eccles, and carried off Mrs. Todhetley's other ear-ring."

Mrs. Bird looked straight before her, making no answer.

"*You* must remember that afternoon, Lucy. You were at old Coney's, you know, when I ran over for Mrs. Todhetley; and I told you all about the ear-rings and the detective officer, then making his dinner of half-cold beef at our house while he waited for the Mater to come home and produce the ear-ring. Don't you remember? You were just going back to Worcester."

Still she said not a word.

"Lucy, I think it is the same man. Although his black moustache is gone, I feel sure it is he. The face and the tall slender figure are just like his."

"How singular!" she exclaimed in a low tone to herself. "How strangely things come about!"

"But *is* it Eccles?"

"Johnny Ludlow," she said, catching my arm, and speaking in an excited, breathless whisper, "if you were to bring harm on me—that is, on him or on my husband through me, I should pray to die."

"But you need not be afraid. Goodness me, Lucy! don't you know

that I'd not bring harm on anybody in the world, least of all on you? Why, you said to me this morning that I was true as steel."

"Yes, yes," she said, bursting into tears. "We have always been good friends, have we not, Johnny, since you, a little mite of a child in a tunic and turned-down frill, came to see me one day at school, a nearly grown-up young lady, and wanted to leave me your bright sixpence to buy gingerbread. Oh, Johnny, if all people were but as loyal and true-hearted as you!"

"Then, Lucy, why need you doubt me?"

"Do you not see the shadows of those leaves playing on the ground, cast by the light of that gas-lamp?" she asked. "Just as many shadows, dark as those, lie in the path of my life. They have taught me to fear an enemy where I ought to look for a friend; they have taught me that life is so full of unexpected windings and turnings that we know not one minute what new fear the next may bring forth."

"Well, Lucy, you need not fear me. I have promised you to say nothing of having met you here; and I will say nothing, or of what you tell me."

"Promise it me again, Johnny. Faithfully."

Just a shade of vexation crossed my heart that she should think it needful to reiterate this; but I would not let my face or voice betray it.

"I promise it again, Lucy. Faithfully and truly."

"Ever since last winter I have wanted to hold communication with one of you at your home, and to restore something that had been lost. But it had to be done very, very cautiously, without bringing trouble on me or on anybody connected with me. Many a solitary hour, sitting by myself in our poor lodgings in London, have I deliberated whether I might venture to restore this, and how it was to be done; many a sleepless night has been passed, dwelling on it. Sometimes I thought I would send it anonymously by the post, but it might have been stolen by the way, and I did not dare to register it in my name or address; sometimes it would occur to me to make a parcel of it and despatch it that way. I never did either. I waited until some chance should bring me again near Mrs. Todhetley. But to-day I saw that it would be better to trust you. She is true also, and kind; but she might not be able to keep the secret from the Squire, and he—he would be sure to betray it, though perhaps not intentionally, to all Timberdale, and there's no knowing what mischief might come of it."

Light flashed upon me as she spoke. As surely as though it were already before me in black and white, I knew what she was about to disclose.

"Lucy, it is the lost ear-ring! The man staying with you *is* Eccles."

"Hush!" she whispered in extreme terror, for a footstep suddenly sounded close to us. Lucy glided behind the trunk of the tree we

were passing; which in a degree served to hide her. How timid she was!——what cause induced it?

The intruder was a shop-boy with an apron on, carrying a basket of grocery parcels to one of the few houses higher up. He turned his head and gave us a good stare, probably taking us for a pair of cooing lovers enjoying a stolen ramble by starlight. Setting up a shrill whistle, he passed on.

"I don't know what has come to me lately; my heart seems to beat at nothing," said poor Mrs. Bird, coming from behind the tree with her hand to her side. "And it was doubly foolish of me to go *there;* better that had kept quietly walking on with you, Johnny."

"What *is* it that you are afraid of, Lucy?"

"Only of *their* seeing me; seeing me with you. Were they to do so, and it were to come out that the ear-ring had been returned, they would know I had done it. They suspected me at the time: at least, Edwards did. For it is the ear-ring I am about to restore to you, Johnny."

She put a little soft white paper packet in my hand, that felt as if it had wool inside it. I hardly knew whether I was awake or asleep. The beautiful ear-ring, that we had given up for good, come back again! And the sound of the drums and trumpets burst once more upon our ears.

"You will give it to Mrs. Todhetley when you get home, Johnny. And I must leave it to your discretion to tell her what you think proper of whence you obtained it. Somewhat of course you must tell her, but how much or how little I leave with you. Only, take care you bring no harm upon me."

"I am sure, Lucy, that Mrs. Todhetley may be trusted."

"Very well. Both of you must be secret as the grave. For my sake tell her I implore it. Perhaps she will keep the ear-ring by her for a few months, saying nothing, so that this visit of ours into Worcestershire may be quite a thing of the past, and no suspicion, in consequence of it, as connected with the ear-ring, may arise in my husband's mind. After that, when months have elapsed, she must contrive to let it appear that the ear-ring is then, in some plausible way or other, returned to her."

"Rely upon it, we will take care. It will be managed very easily. But how did you get the ear-ring, Lucy?"

"It has been in my possession ever since the night of the day you lost it; that Sunday afternoon, you know. I have carried it about with me everywhere."

"Do you mean carried it upon you?"

"Yes; upon me."

"I wonder you never lost it—a little thing like this!" I said, touching the soft packet that lay in my jacket pocket.

"I could not lose it," she whispered. "It was sewn into my clothes."

"But, Lucy, how did you manage to get it?"

She gave me the explanation in a few low, rapid words, glancing about her as she did it. Perhaps I had better repeat it in my own way; and to do that we must go back to the Sunday afternoon. At least, that will render it more intelligible and ship-shape. But I did not learn the one half of the details then: no, nor for a long time afterwards. And so, we go back again in imagination to the time of that January day, when the snow was lying on the ground, and Farmer Coney's good fires were blazing hospitably.

Lucy Bird quitted the warm fires and her kind friends, the Coneys, and followed us out; she saw us turn in at our own gate, and then she picked her way through the snow to the station at South Crabb. It was a long walk for her in that inclement weather; but she had been away from home (if the poor lodgings they then occupied in Worcester could be called home) three days, and was anxious to get back. During her brief absences from it, she was always haunted by the fear of some ill falling on that precious husband of hers, Captain Bird: but he was nothing but an ex-captain, as you know. All the way to the station she was thinking about the ear-rings, and of my description of Detective Eccles. The description was exactly that of her husband's friend, Edwards, both as to person and dress; not that she supposed it could be he. When she left Worcester three days before, Edwards had just arrived. She knew him to be an educated man, of superior manners, and full of anecdote, when he chose, about college life. Like her husband, he had by recklessness and ill conduct sunk lower and lower in the world, until he had to depend on "luck" or "chance" for a living.

Barely had Lucy reached the station, when the train shot in. She took her seat; and after a short halt, the train moved on again. At that moment there strode into the station that self-same man, Edwards, who began shouting furiously for the train to stop, putting up his hands, running, and gesticulating. The train declined to stop; trains generally do decline to stop for late passengers, however frantically adjured; and Edwards was left behind. His appearance astonished Lucy considerably. Had he, in truth, been passing himself off as a detective officer to Squire Todhetley? If so, with what motive? Lucy could not see any inducing motive, and still thought it could not be; that Edwards must be over here on some business of his own. The matter passed from her mind as she drew near Worcester, and reached their lodgings—which were down Lowesmoor way.

Experience had taught Lucy not to ask questions. She was either not answered at all, or the answer would be sure to give her trouble.

Captain Bird had grown tolerably careless as to whether his hazardous doings reached, or did not reach, the ears of his wife, but he did not willingly tell her of them. She said not a word of having seen Edwards, or of what she had heard about the loss of Mrs. Todhetley's ear-ring, or of the detective's visit to Crabb Cot. Lucy's whole life was one of dread and fear, and she never knew whether any remark of hers might not bear upon some dangerous subject. But, while getting the tea, she did just enquire after Edwards.

"Has Edwards left?" she asked carelessly.

"No," replied Captain Bird, who was stretched out before the fire in his slippers, smoking a long pipe, and drinking spirits. He is out on the loose, though, somewhere to day."

It was late at night when Edwards entered. He was in a rage. Trains did not run frequently on Sundays, and he had been kept all that while at South Crabb junction, waiting for one. Lucy went upstairs to bed, leaving Edwards and her husband toping away at brandy and water. Both of them had had quite enough already.

The matter of the ear-rings and the doubt whether Mr. Edwards had been playing at amateur detectiveship would have ended there, but for the accident of Lucy's having to come downstairs again, to get the small travelling bag in which she had carried her combs and brushes. She had put it just inside the little back parlour, where a bed on chairs had been extemporised for Edwards, their lodgings not being very extensive. Lucy was taking up the bag in the dark, when some words in the sitting-room caught her ears; the door between the two rooms being partly open. Before a minute elapsed she had heard too much. Edwards, in a loud, gleeful, boasting tone, was telling how he had been acting the detective, and done the old Squire and his wife out of the other ear-ring. Lucy, looking in through the opening, saw him holding it up; she saw the colours of the long pink topaz drop, and of the diamonds gleaming in the candle-light.

"I thought I could relieve them of it," he said. "When I read that advertisement in the paper, it struck me there might be a field open to do a little stroke of business; and I've done it."

"You are a fool for your pains," growled Captain Bird. "There's sure to be a row."

"The row won't touch me. I'm off to London to-morrow morning, and the ear-ring with me. I wonder what the thing will turn us in? Twenty pounds? There, put it in the box, Bird, and get out the dice."

The dice on a Sunday night!

Lucy felt quite sick as she went back upstairs. What would be the end of all this? Not of this one transaction in particular, but of all the other disgraceful transactions with which her husband was connected? It might come to some public exposure, some criminal trial

at the Bar of Justice; and of that she had a horrible dread ever haunting her like a nightmare.

She undressed, and went to bed. One hour passed, two hours passed, three hours passed. Lucy turned and turned on her uneasy pillow, feeling fit to die. Besides her own anguish arising from *their* share in it, she was dwelling on the shameful wrong it did their kind friends at Crabb Cot.

The fourth hour was passing. Captain Bird had not come up, and Lucy grew uneasy on that score. Once, when he had taken too much (but as a general rule the ex-captain's delinquencies did not lie in that direction), he had set his shirt sleeve on fire, and burnt his hands badly in putting it out. Slipping out of bed, Lucy put on her slippers and the large old shawl, and crept down to see after him.

Opening the sitting-room door very softly, she looked in. The candles were alight still, but had burnt down nearly to the socket, the dice and some cards were scattered on the table.

Edwards lay at full length on the old red stuff sofa: Captain Bird had thrown himself outside the bed in the other room, the door of which was now wide open, neither of them having undressed. That both were wholly or partially intoxicated, Lucy felt not a doubt of.

Well, she could only leave them as they were. They would come to no harm asleep. Neither would the candles: which must soon burn themselves out. Lucy was about to shut the door again, when her eye fell on the little pasteboard box that contained the ear-ring.

Without a moment's reflection, acting on the spur of impulse, she softly stepped to the table, lifted the lid, and took the ear-ring out.

"I will remedy the wrong they have done Mrs. Todhetley," she said to herself. "They will never suspect me."

Up in her room again, she lighted her candle and looked about for some place to conceal the ear-ring, and just as the idea to secure it had come unbidden to her, so did that of a safe place of concealment. With feverish hands she undid a bit of the quilting of her petticoat, one that she had but just made for herself out of an old merino gown, slipped the ear-ring in amid the wadding, and sewed it up again. It could neither be seen nor suspected there; no, nor even felt, let the skirt be examined as it might. That done, poor Lucy got into bed again and at length fell asleep.

She was awoke by a commotion. It was broad daylight, and her husband (not yet as sober as he might be), was shaking her by the arm. Edwards was standing outside the door, calling out to know whether Mrs. Bird had "got it."

"What is the matter, George?" she cried, starting up in a fright, and for the moment completely forgetting where she was, for she had been aroused from a vivid dream of Timberdale.

"Have you been bringing anything up here from the sitting-room, Lucy?" asked Captain Bird.

"No, nothing," she replied promptly, and he saw that she spoke with truth. For Lucy's recollection had not come to her; she remembered nothing yet about the ear-ring.

"There's something missing," said Captain Bird, speaking thickly. "It has disappeared mysteriously off the sitting-room table. You are sure you have not been down and collared it, Lucy?"

The ear-ring and the theft—her own theft—flashed into her memory together. Oh if she could but avert suspicion from herself! And she strove to call up no end of surprise in her voice.

"Why, how could I have been down, George? Did you not see that I was fast asleep? What have you missed? Some money?"

"Money, no. It was—something of Edwards's. Had it close by him on the table when he went to sleep, he says—he lay on the sofa last night and I had his bed—and this morning it was gone. I thought the house was on fire by the fierce way he came and shook me."

"I'll look for it when I come down, if you tell me what it is," said poor Lucy. "How late I have slept! It must have been the cold journey."

"She has not got it," said Captain Bird, retreating to his friend outside, and closing the door on Lucy. "Knows nothing about it. Was asleep till I awoke her."

"Search the room, you fool," cried the excited Mr. Edwards. "I'd never trust the word of a woman. No offence to your wife, Bird, but they are *not* to be trusted."

"Rubbish!" said Captain Bird.

"Either she or you must have got it. It could not disappear without hands. The people down below have not been to our rooms, as you must know."

"She or I—what do you mean by that?" retorted Captain Bird; and a short sharp quarrel ensued. That the Captain had not touched the ear-ring, Edwards knew full well. It was Edwards who had helped him to reach the bed the previous night: and since then he had been in the deep sleep of stupor. But Edwards did think the Captain's wife had. The result was that Captain Bird re-entered; and, ordering Lucy to lie still, he made as exact a search of the room as his semi-sobered faculties allowed. Lucy watched it from her bed. Amid the general hunting and turning-over of drawers and places, she saw him pick up her gown and petticoats one by one and shake them thoroughly; but he found no signs of the ear-ring.

From that time to this the affair had remained a mystery. There had been no one in the house that night, save the proprietor and his wife, two quiet old people who never concerned themselves with their lodgers. They protested that the street door had been fast, and that no midnight marauder could have broken in and slipped upstairs to steal

a pearl brooch (as Edwards put it) or any other article. So, failing the feasibility of other outlets of suspicion, Edwards continued to suspect Lucy. There were moments when Bird did also: though he trusted her, in regard to it, on the whole. At any rate Lucy was obliged to be most cautious. The quilted skirt had never been off her since, except at night: through the warm genial days of spring and the sultry heat of summer she had worn the clumsy wadded thing continually: and the ear-ring had never been disturbed until this afternoon.

"You see how it is, Johnny," she said to me, with one of her sobbing sighs. But at that same moment the grocer's young man in the white apron came back down the walk, swinging his empty basket by the handle; and he took another good stare at us in passing.

"I mean, as to the peril I should be in if you suffer the restoration of the ear-ring to transpire," she continued in a whisper, when he was a safe distance. "Oh, Johnny Ludlow! do you and Mrs. Todhetley take care, for my poor sake!"

"Lucy, you need not doubt either of us," I said earnestly. "We will be, as you phrased it to-day, true as steel—and as cautious. Are you going back? Let me walk up to the top with you."

"No, no; we part here. The seeing us together might arouse some suspicion, and there is no absolute certainty that they may not come out, though I don't think they will. Edwards is for ever thinking of that ear-ring: he does not feel safe about it, you perceive. Go you that way: I go this. Farewell, Johnny Ludlow, farewell."

"Good night, Lucy. I am off to the circus now."

She went with a brisk step up the walk. I ran out by St. Oswald's, and so on to the Saracen's head. The place was crammed. I could not get near Tod and Harry Parker; but they whistled at me across the sawdust and the fancy steeds performing on it.

We sat together in her bedroom at Dyke Manor, the door bolted against intruders. Mrs. Todhetley, in her astonishment at the tale I told, hardly daring to touch the ear-ring. It was Saturday morning; we had come home from Worcester the previous evening; and should now be off to school in an hour. Tod had gone strolling out with the Squire; which gave me my opportunity.

"You see, good mother, how it all is, and the risk we run. Do you know, I had half a mind to keep the ear-ring myself for some months and say never a word to you; only I was not sure of pitching on a safe hiding-place. It would be so dreadful a thing for Lucy Bird if it were to get known."

"Poor Lucy, poor Lucy!" she said, the tears on her light eyelashes. "Oh, Johnny, if she could but be induced to leave that man!"

"But she can't, you know. Robert Ashton has tried over and over to get her back to the Court—and tried in vain. See how it shines!"

I was holding the ear-ring so that the rays of the sun fell upon it, flashing and sparkling. It seemed more beautiful than it used to be.

"I am very very glad to have it back, Johnny; the other one was useless without it. You have not," with a tone of apprehension in her voice, "told Joseph?"

I shook my head. The truth was, I had never longed to tell any thing so much in my life; for what did I ever conceal from him? It was hard work, I can assure you. The ear-ring burning a hole in my pocket, and I not able to show Tod that it was there!

"And now, mother, where will you put it?"

She rose to unlock a drawer, took from it a small blue box in the shape of a trunk, and unlocked that.

"It is in this that I keep all my little valuables, Johnny. It will be quite safe here. By-and-by we must invent some mode of 'recovering the ear-ring,' as poor Lucy said."

Lifting the lid of a little pasteboard box, she showed me the fellow ear-ring lying in a nest of cotton. I took it out.

"Put them both into your ears for a minute, good mother! Do!"

She smiled, hesitated; then took out the plain rings that were in her ears, and put in the beautiful topaz and diamond ones. Going to the glass to look at herself, she saw the Squire and Tod advancing in the distance. It sent us into a panic. Scuffling the ear-rings out of her ears, she laid them together on the wool in the cardboard box, put the lid on, and folded it round with white paper.

"Light one of the candles on my dressing-table, Johnny. We will seal it up for greater security: there's a bit of red sealing-wax in the tray." And I did so at her direction: stamping it with the seal that had been my father's, and which with his watch they had only recently allowed me to take into wearing.

"There," she said, "should anybody by chance see that packet, though it is not likely, and be curious as to know what it contains, I shall say that I cannot satisfy them, as it concerns Johnny Ludlow."

"Are you upstairs, Johnny? What in the world are you doing there?"

I went leaping down at Tod's call. All was safe now.

That's how the other ear-ring came back. And "Eccles" had to be let off scot free. But I was glad he got the ducking.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

ON BELLS.

"Therefore I'd have ye not to vapour,
Nor blame ye lads that use ye clapper;
By which are scared ye fiends of hell,
And all by virtue of a bell."

Inscription in Gulval Church.

THERE are more mysteries in a peal of bells than are dreamt of in our philosophy. To the uninitiated, the very names of the different changes are appalling. What will the unlearned say to plain-bob-triples, bob-majors, bob-majors-reversed, double-bob-majors, double bob-royals, and treble-bob-royals?

Now who was Bob? Was there only one eccentric Bob who composed these peals? or a legion of Bobs, or six bell-ringing Bobs, whose friends invented this ingenious method of distinguishing them? We have heard of the three old men of Keswick, all named Tommy Potts, who lived in three houses at the foot of Skiddaw and who, to prevent confusion (?), answered to the appellations of Near Tommy, Middle Tommy, and Far Tommy; but the Bob family—major, minor, double and triple, royal and plain, we have not, so far, had the pleasure of meeting.

But though these Bobs sound sufficiently mysterious, two worse Bobs still remain. These tremendous peals are called grandsire-bob-cators, and bob-maximus. Grandsire-bob consists of seven hundred and twenty changes, rung in one thousand four hundred and forty different ways. Bob-maximus we dare not inquire into at all.

It is almost impossible to imagine the time when bells were not; but such was the benighted state of the old world, that the ancient Greeks and Romans, not to mention the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Ante-diluvians, celebrated their royal marriages and birthdays, thanksgiving days, and fifths of November, without a single tinkle ringing out from the clouded heights of the tower of Babel, the apex of their pyramids, or the classic heights of their Acropolis. Nothing but a state of heathenism can account for such a want of tuneful taste. Even the Chinese were evidently more civilized, for a pagoda without its bells would be an anomaly not to be imagined, and the celestials no doubt were ringing their joyous carillons when the rest of the barbarians were still without a single peal.

Europe, indeed, was not long to remain in such a blissful state of ignorance, or rather silence, for about A.D. 400, one Paulinus, Bishop of Nosa in Campania, invented, or cast, the first church bells. The ancient Britons, however, having at that far-away time scarcely emerged from

their mud huts and blue paint, were too busy erecting houses and adorning themselves, to profit as they might have done by this wonderful invention; and it was not till two centuries later on, when, having clothed themselves à-la-mode, amended the error of their ways, and submitted quietly to the barbarians, that the venerable Father Bede chronicles the advent of the first peal of bells.

For many centuries, bell founding, like most other scientific pursuits, was carried on exclusively in the monasteries; so that these clamorous lively bantlings were bien élevé from their earliest youth; and, from their first baptism till their final hoisting up, the tone of their morals was rigidly watched and tested. The infant bell, even in a molten state, was subjected to a special consecration. This preliminary ceremony was sufficiently curious: all the brethren in the monastery were ranged in order round the furnace; the 150th Psalm was sung and certain prayers offered; the liquid metal was blessed and a petition put up that the saint whose name it was destined to bear would even now take it under his, or her, special protection.

When the bell had safely arrived at man's estate came the christening, a long and important ceremony; the bells having godfathers and godmothers, like any other right-minded Christians.* This second baptism was performed in church before the whole congregation: two vessels, one containing holy oil and the other holy water, were prepared; the priest, dipping a linen cloth into the water, washed the bell within and without, the bell being suspended over a larger vessel, that no drop of the holy water might touch the ground. The same ceremony was gone into with the holy oil, the attendant monks meanwhile chanting the 96th, and other psalms; the bell was then named, after which the whole was repeated five times with various additions of incensing, anointing, ringing, &c. When this six-fold baptism was disposed of; and for a whole peal it must have been an uncommonly long performance; the priest explained to the people the reason of the ceremony, which was that the bells might act as preservatives against hail, wind, thunder, lightning, and storms, and above all drive away evil spirits. Truly the office of the old bells could have been no sinecure, so tremendous a task as scaring away the devil depending on the vigilance of their clappers.

Sometimes, with all these edifying precautions, the old bells did not keep their legitimate names. The celebrated Great John at Oxford was christened Mary, in honour of the most Catholic queen. The Vice-chancellor's exclamation on first hearing it ring has been recorded. "Oh! delicate and sweet harmony; oh, beautiful Mary, how musically she sounds, how strangely she pleaseth mine ear!"

In spite of all this admiration, Mary refused to retain her name; probably the deep, sonorous tone was too powerful for a feminine bell; she assumed the name of John and keeps it, christening notwithstanding.

* Southey.

The inscriptions on bells are sometimes very curious. The oldest are in the Lombardic, or black-letter character; but, as no dates were added till the sixteenth century, it is impossible to tell their ages. The following is a transcript of a black-letter inscription:

"Sum Rosa Pulsata Mundi Katerina Vocata."

Another old bell bears the following very similar lines, quoted by Longfellow in the "Golden Legend:"

"Sabbata Pango,
Funera Plango,
Solemnia Clango;"

of which a free translation is still to be seen on a bell in Durham Cathedral:—

"To call the folks to church in time—I chime.
When mirth and joy are on the wing—I ring.
When from the body parts the soul—I toll."

An old writer says, "Fame often makes a great deal of a little. Loud was the lie which that bell told, hanging in a clock-house at Westminster, and usually rung at the coronation and funeral of princes, having this inscription about it:

"King Edward made me,
Thirty thousand and three;*
Take me down and weigh me,
And more you shall find me."

But when this bell *was* taken down at the doomsday of abbeys, this and two more were found not to weigh twenty thousand. Many tales of fame are found to shrink accordingly." †

An ambitious little bell at St. Mary's, Devizes, says,

"I am the first, altho' but small,
I will be heard above you all;"

And at Aldbourne, on the fourth bell,

"Humphrey Symsin gave xx. pound to buy this bell,
And the parish gave xx more to make this ring go well."

A delicate insinuation that Humphrey Symsin's bell was cracked.

Gentle reader, were you ever in a belfry when a peal of tuneful bells was ringing? when the chiming melody floated away on the outside breeze, far above the light and murmur of the town, in sweet modulations of rhythmic sound? If so, you will know to your cost that within the effect is not so perfectly harmonious. The liquid golden notes swelling so deliciously on the ear in the open air, are a clamorous jangling and wrangling confusion in the echoing arches of the steeple,

* Namely, pounds. † Fuller.

and the belfry a very pandemonium of turbulent uproar, from the deep booming bass and shrill tenor bells.

Very strange, weird places are some of those old belfries, dim with the mists and cobwebs of bygone years, full of quaint echoes and fancies that belonged to generations of forgotten people, whose shadows, gravely dark and mysterious, still seem to haunt the place where they once rang many a joyous peal. In the old towers and steeples, up many a step worn by feet that now are silent, past airy arch and narrow loop-hole in the very home of the ancient peals of bells, are to be found many a curious recollection of these dead and gone bell-ringers; odd jingling rhymes inscribed on the lasting stone, and telling of long-forgotten customs, and long-forgotten people; curious relics and old personal belongings of these professors of a joyous science whose music is of the far past, but whose memories are even yet present with us.

There were regular codes of laws and customs in use among these old bell-ringers, many of which are still to be found, generally in out-of-the-way country churches and chapels. It is somewhat amusing to find in these codes considerable proof of the mirth and conviviality with which the originators seasoned their tuneful labours; and the fines, inflicted for various breaches of belfry etiquette, invariably went towards the filling of an immense beer-jug for their refreshment and consolation. Not a few of these famous pitchers are still in existence, they are of considerable size, holding from four to six gallons, and are generally inscribed with a line or two of doggerel rhymes in praise of good beer and good fellowship. At Swansea, the Ringers' Jug bears these two lines:

"Come fill me full with liquor sweet, for that is good when friends do meet;
When I am full then drink about, I ne'er will fail till all is out."

One of these ancient relics is the Hadleigh jug, a curiosity that has belonged from time immemorial to the Hadleigh bell-ringers. This famous pitcher is of brown earthenware, circular in shape, swelling out in the middle, but contracted at each end, and having two ears. It holds sixteen quarts, and bears this inscription—no doubt the names of the eight ringers—rudely indented, apparently with a chisel, in Roman capitals:

"Me, Thomas Windle, Isaac Bunn, John Mann, Adam Sage, George Bond, Thomas Goldborough, Robert Smith, Henry West."

Below the names,—

"If you love me doe not lend me,
Euse me often, and keep me clenly,
Fill me full, or not at all,
If it be strong, and not with small."

This benevolently-disposed pitcher is still used on extraordinary occasions, and is filled every Christmas by mine host of the "Eight

Bells Inn" with strong beer, which goes by the name of "King William." Any stranger going in is expected to pay sixpence to assist in replenishing this capacious measure.

A still older jug is in the Norwich Museum. It is dated 1676, has but one handle, and is curiously ornamented. The inscription is,

"John Wayman,
J. F.
Come, brother, shall we join?
Give me your twopence—here is mine."

At one time, about the seventeenth century, campanology was a gentleman's recreation, and a particularly laborious one it must have been, for very hard work it is that goes on up in the belfry. An amount of physical force and scientific skill is required in the management of a bell-rope that ought to be respectfully spoken of. Ben Jonson says, "If the bells have any sides, the clapper will find 'em:" but a long pull and a strong pull is necessary to beguile a single tinkle from either bell or clapper; and to ring in perfect time and tune is an accomplishment so difficult of attainment, that months of daily practice are necessary to produce even a respectable amount of excellence. Those knights and squires of auld lang syne must have been made of stern stuff when they took to bell-ringing as a mere amusement; but that this is an undoubted fact is attested by the old inscriptions in belfries, which repeatedly mention their bells as being rung by gentlemen, and this at a time when the term was not quite so indiscriminately applied as at present. At the church of Chapel-en-le-Frith, near Manchester, is a complete set of rules, especially agreed upon by these gentlemanly ringers for their own use. They are too long for insertion entire, but the most striking are as follows,—

"Gentlemen that here intend to ring,
See these laws you keep in everything;
First, when you to the bell-house here do come,
See that the ringers have convenient room;
Next, if you do intend here for to ring,
With hat or spur on, do not touch a string;
If you a bell throw over, without delay,
Eightpence to the clerk you then must pay.

* * * * *

For every oath here sworn, ere you go hence,
Unto the poor you then must pay twelve pence.

* * * * *

And whoso doth these orders disobey,
Unto the stocks he shall be brought straightway,
And there remain until that he be willing
To pay his forfeit and the clerk a shilling."

The special notice against hats and spurs is curious. Probably the hats were of the gorgeous type—feathered, and looped with jewels—

common to the Cavaliers. At St. Peter's Church, Shaftesbury, is an inscription in which the objection extends to the belt as well—

> "In your ringing make no demur,
> Pull off your hat, your belt, and spur."

At Tong Church, in Shropshire, date 1694, a penalty is exacted for the benefit of thirsty souls—

> "If that you ring with spur or hat,
> A jugg of beer must pay for that."

These gentlemanly bellringers seem to have indulged in a considerable amount of strong language; in almost every inscription there is a caution against the use thereof and a punishment or fine inflicted. At the Parish Church of Andover is—

> "But if that you do swear or curse,
> Twelve pence is due, pull out your purse."

At Calstack Church, Cornwall, those who were in the habit of letting their angry passions rise, were cautioned particularly strongly—

> "Who swears or curse, or in a cholerick mood
> Quarrels or strike, altho' he draw no blood,
> Let him pay Sixpence for each single crime,
> 'Twill make him cautious 'gainst another time."

Whether these doughty champions of bell-ringing submitted to the fines and punishment with due humility, history sayeth not. The confinement of the "stocks" would—according to our views—be so obnoxious that it is difficult to imagine anyone submitting to it, excepting, like Signor Riccabocca, "to try what it was like."

The number of changes that can be rung on a peal of bells is almost incredible. It would take ninety-one years to ring the changes upon twelve bells at the rate of two strokes to a second; the changes upon fourteen could not be rung through at the same rate in less than 16,575 years; and upon four-and-twenty they would require more than 117,000 billions of years.*

In 1796 the Westmoreland youths rang a complete course of 5,040 peals—called by the mysterious name of grandsire triples—in three hours and twenty minutes. This was considered a gigantic performance, but it was fairly eclipsed by the men of Kidderminster, who rang the changes in three hours and fourteen minutes—a feat which seems incredible, comprising as it does 1,267,453 separate strokes or rings. Truly there were giants in the land in those days.

But the bell-ringing of England, however scientifically and powerfully performed, is a mere meaningless jingle, compared to the beautiful carillons of the Continent; indeed, the art as practised in England

* Southey.

belongs peculiarly to us, the Continental bells being almost universally played by keys.

At Amsterdam, about the year 1600, was born one Franz Hemony, who may safely be styled the very king of bell-founding, since he it was who wrought the colossal peals of Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent, Utrecht, &c. His name is frequently found inscribed on the Holland bells. These bells are gigantic musical notes. At Utrecht there are forty-two; at Antwerp over one hundred; the general number is from thirty to sixty, but in the Tower of Les Halles at Bruges is the finest carillon in the Low Countries—perhaps, in the world. It was on these bells "low and loud, and sweetly blended," that Longfellow wrote his carillon, as he lay

> "In Bruges, at the Fleur de Blé,
> Listening with a wild delight
> To the chimes that through the night
> Rang their changes from the belfry
> Of that quaint old Flemish city."

Hemony arranged his bells in tiers. Six or eight of the largest bass bells were hung on the first floor of the belfry, perhaps 150 feet up the tower; higher still, among many an airy arch and solid buttress, hung ten or twelve smaller ones; highest of all, far away, a dim dizzy height, hung twenty or thirty more. These stupendous peals are sounded by means of a cylinder, on the principle of a barrel-organ, or played by keys by a musician. Every tone and semi-tone are represented, and the most delicate harmony, the grandest chorales, and most intricate figures can be executed on these bells. But what a giant in conception and power must be the musician who presides over this colossal harmony; what a sense of unlimited command over the power of sound as he thunders out sonorous grand chords, stately solemn melodies, gentle cadences of ringing mirth, or soft floating phrases like a dream of silver bells; what a sense of supreme sway, as the grand music rolls over the country for miles and miles, filling the air with its wonderful grandeur and beauty, and causing the heart to swell with emotion at the unutterable splendour of the music which seems to float up to heaven and die among the stars!

We have no carillons to compare with this in England. There is a small one at St. Giles' Church, Edinburgh, and it is said that one is to be placed in St. Paul's; whether the present generation of Londoners will ever hear this bell-music float over their grim dusky town, is an open question.

The bell-ringers at the church of St. Margaret, Dunham Massey, make a very successful attempt at a connected melody on Christmas Day. Instead of the ordinary peal, the ringers chime the old Christmas hymn, "Christians, awake." The effect is very charming, though, owing to the want of several semitones, the air is not quite perfect.

To any one hearing it for the first time, the peculiar dropping-from-above sound of this chimed hymn is very fascinating.

We are told there is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous, but at least there are a good many tuneful gradations from the carillon at Bruges to the Pancake Bell at Newbury. In "Poor Robin," so long ago as 1684, this renowned bell is mentioned in the following savoury couplet,—

> "Hark, I hear the Pancake Bell,
> And fritters make a gallant smell."

In this case one feels for the bellman, who, by the necessity of his calling, must have been shut out from his share of the dainty feast.

A still more curious bell was rung in the town of Preston, so lately as 1860. It was styled in the Lancashire vernacular "th' barm bell.' An old man perambulated the town with large cans of yeast, and a big bell which he rang energetically to apprise the housekeepers of his arrival. The old gentleman was an institution, and, like not a few other old institutions, somewhat crotchety; we once heard a woman remark, when both bell and barm had failed to make their usual appearance, "that th' old fule war nobbut a sounden brass an' a tinglin cymbul wi' his bell an' his bounce."

In Southey's "Doctor," a short paragraph is devoted to the memory of a celebrated composer of church-bell music, named Dr. Patrick. He it was who composed the peal called "Stedman's Triples," till then deemed an impracticable feat; real double and treble bob-royals are also monuments of his superlative merits. Would that we were of the initiated, to appreciate these mysterious peals as they ought to be. This Dr. Patrick was interred at the church of St. Leonard's, Shoreditch. He was followed to the grave by all the ringing societies in London, each person sounding hand-bells with muffled clappers, the church-bells at the same time ringing a death peal.

Great, then, are the mysteries of bell-ringing! And this may be said in its praise, that, of all devices which men have sought out for obtaining distinction by making a noise in the world, it is the most harmless.* We might also go on for ever, for the subject, like the changes upon the bells, is inexhaustible. Madame de Sévigné says, "Chacun a son stile; le mien comme vous le voyez n'est pas laconique." It is impossible also to be condensed upon so fascinating a subject as bells; for, after all, we have not said a word about wedding bells, or birthday bells, or celebration bells, or ship bells, or fire bells, or muffin bells—or the dinner bell.

M. M. D.

* Southey.

TOLD ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

CHAPTER I.

VIOLET SILVER.

IT had its commencement like a romance of Fairy Land, amongst the roses and in the moonlight.

A great emerald bank overhung a vast lake, fringed at its foot with a golden beach, and crowned with great pines, mingling their spicy incense with the breath of the roses, swinging their crimson blossoms in the garden midway up the steep, where, on a natural terrace, glimmered the white walls of a pretty house.

A wide lawn sloped to the beach, bordered with guelder-rose-trees and acacias, shedding pearly globes and drooping feathery blooms in the air, heavy with dewy perfume; and two or three beeches echoed back the sleepy murmur of the lake, as their leaves rustled softly in the passing wind.

From this wide lawn a maze of winding paths led in and out through glowing alleys of roses. Every kind of rose that ever blushed beneath the sun, or gently swayed in the summer breeze, was there. Hence it was that Mr. Arnold Silver's pretty villa by the inland lake was called "The Roses."

A hedge of dwarf myrtle enclosed this radiant spot: and, for artistic contrast with the masses of bloom within, some melancholy yew-trees stood darkly beyond the gates. This night the scene was inexpressibly beautiful. The moonlight poured down a flood of pale silver radiance, mingling with the traces of the sunset in the west, the pink hue deepening to amethyst where it kissed the lake; and over head was the deep blue of the sky, decked with shining stars.

Far out on the lake a boat glided phantom-like across the diamond track of the moonlight, which seemed leading to the mysterious amethyst gates of the dim horizon. The lights of the villa, poised midway up the hill, sent lances of red light deep into the placid bosom of the night, whose wind was odorous with the scent of flowers.

A fountain opposite the drawing-room windows threw a column of water upwards, its spray, as it fell again, flashing like diamonds in the moonlight. And on the basin's marble margin stood a tall slender girl in a white dress, her arm over the neck of a white doe, at the feet of which crouched a fawn with great dusky eyes and a collar tinkling with silver bells round its graceful neck.

This was Violet Silver, the only child and heiress of Arnold Silver, the younger of those two great merchants, "Silver Brothers," who, as the fairy tales say, "might have eaten gold every day," or, like the

famous king and queen, have occupied themselves principally in "counting out their money," and found plenty of work at the same pleasant task.

Violet looked in the moonlight what the "garish day" would still behold her: a beautiful girl of winning loveliness, perfect in form and feature. Tall and lithe was she, with a pure face of delicate hue and contour, and dark blue eyes that could either flash or smile.

When the caprice was on her, she could be haughty as you please, and walk through the world with her head up to scorn the earth. This only occurred when her father, Mr. Arnold Silver, wrought himself to a pitch of despotism: forbidding her to skate on the lake (that other lake at their winter residence) when the ice was rotten, or refusing to let her ride her favourite vicious horse, Thunderer, or interfered in some other atrocious way. But latterly Violet had seemed much subdued.

Whose are those lines so happy in their simplicity?—

> "Peace charmed the street beneath her feet,
> And honour charmed the air,
> And all astir looked kind on her,
> And called her good as fair!"

They describe that sweet Violet, that nineteen-year-old sylph, with the sinless brow and the radiant young eyes, better than words of mine could, though I wrote with a diamond pen. As she stood there, still as a statue under the moon, the two dumb companions at her feet, they looked like some lovely group of enchanted creatures suddenly turned to forms of pearl by the potent wave of a geni's hand.

Heaven alone knows what sublime thoughts made the girl's countenance so angelic, as her shining eyes went from star to star, her lips parted with breathless thought.

"Fairy," she said, coming out of her reverie, and patting the velvet skin of the snowy doe with her hand, "we like the moonlight sometimes, don't we? Especially when there are no ridiculous Charlies near to talk nonsense and disturb our meditations. Ah, 'mention an angel, and hear the flutter of its wings!'" she broke off. "Speak of Charlie, and smell his cigar!"

Charles Silver, her cousin, was emerging from the open French window of the dining-room. She turned to regard him with a glance curiously compounded of sunshine and shade—a subtle shade; not tangible enough to be called melancholy, but something very like it, in her great violet eyes.

He did not speak as he came up to her, but seated himself on the marble brim in silence. She caught the look of vexation on his countenance.

"There is something the matter, Charlie!" said she. "It is nothing about *that*, is it?"

"It just is about that," replied Charles Silver, ruefully. "The two have been at it, hammer and tongs, ever since you left the table! For my benefit, of course." And Mr Charles Silver groaned, and ran his fingers desperately through his crisp brown hair.

"Well," said Violet, with spirit, "I suppose *I* am to be consulted in the affair. I wonder at papa!" and a great flush swept over her face and neck, and stained the pretty hand lying on Fairy's collar.

"You'd wonder more had you been there," remarked Charlie, gloomily. "We are to be married on Christmas Day, my young lady."

"What?" demanded Violet.

"I shall be of age then, you know."

"*What?*" repeated Violet, her bosom heaving, her eyes flashing, her cheeks flaming like scarlet roses.

"It is perfectly true!" said Charles. "I'm sure I am as sorry for the worry as you can be, Violet."

"You *don't* think I am going to marry you, do you, sir?"

"They don't want either of us to think at all, as it seems to me," was his answer. "It is awfully hard on us both, and—and on Daisy too, you know."

"What did papa say?" demanded Violet, imperiously. "Though you *are* my cousin, I think you are a coward, Charles Silver!"

"Do you? Sorry for that. Uncle Arnold held out a little: he thought we might be allowed a voice in the matter, you and I. But—you know my father, Violet! He put on one of those iron looks; and—and you needn't call a fellow names. I'd like very much to see *you* tell my father to his face that you'd not do as he wished."

"Oh!" said Violet, stretching out her round white arm like a young sibyl, her nostrils dilating as though there were the breath of coming war in the air, "*I* am not his daughter, and I am not afraid. If you promise faithfully to be as brave as I am, why—you will marry Daisy Leighton in time."

"I'll promise anything you like," said Charles. "As to Daisy, I intend to marry her. But for her, I should only have been too glad to take you, Violet. A fellow can't help these things, you know."

"Thank you!" said Violet, with superb disdain, elevating her pretty nose toward the stars. "You need not apologise."

"The worst of it is, I dare not say a word to Daisy while things are in this state," grumbled he. "It might lead to no end of a complication."

"As to me," said Violet, fractiously, "I—I shall go into a convent or something, as soon as you are married, and

> "'With my hand on my bosom, my head on my knee,
> Sing willow, willow, willow.'"

"Oh, come," said Charlie, much aggrieved at the tone; "what with

you and my father, I shall begin to wish I was dead. I'll go for a sailor!"

"Will you?"

"You know, Violet, I care for you as though you were my sister; and you turn me into ridicule without mercy! If I had a huge black moustache like *some* people, it would be different!" he added significantly. "*I* know. *I* have seen."

Violet turned very pale in the moonlight. She sank down on the ledge of the fountain beside her cousin, and, taking his hand between her soft palms, laid her pretty cheek against it.

"Charlie, dear," she said softly, "you have just said you are fond of me."

"Yes," said Charlie, considerably mollified. "I am fonder of you than of any one in the world—Daisy excepted."

"Then you must promise never, never, never to—to allude to that again. Think of the fuss there'd be! Be quiet, Charles! *you* must not turn against me. I'll tell about you and Daisy if you do. You have your secrets, sir, and surely I may have mine. Promise—until I give you leave."

"I promise," said Charles Silver, who was the easiest-natured fellow in the world. "But, Violet, do you think it's just the thing to meet him in the way you do? Nobody knows the man."

Violet turned to caress Fairy, and so hid her bright blush from her cousin.

"Never mind, Charlie," she said, with a little quiver in her sweet young voice; "you may be quite at rest. You *know* I would not do anything that's wrong?"

"Of course, I know that."

"Very well. Then, as I say, you may be at rest. Go in and play your evening game at chess with Daisy, there's a good fellow: if we both stay out they may miss us. Oh, Charles!" she added, with impressive, almost solemn earnestness, as she took both his hands, "you do not know all the interests that are at stake. Papa and Uncle Aurelius must suspect nothing."

"I don't like mysteries," returned Charles Silver. "But I suppose I must depend upon you, Violet."

"You *may*," was the emphatic answer. And Violet once more laid her hand on Fairy's neck; while the fawn gambolled around, shaking airy peals from the silver bells.

Charles Silver, throwing away the end of his cigar, returned to the house. He pushed back the lace draperies of the drawing-room window, and stood at the shoulder of a tiny little creature, a girl of eighteen, with a Zingaree-like face and great, melancholy, dark eyes. She was sitting on a low ottoman, gazing blankly at the opposite wall, her slender brown hands clasped idly on a heap of glowing roses,

which she had been pulling from a Sèvres vase on a marble stand at her side. This was Daisy Leighton. She was in deep mourning, and looked a pathetic, dark little phantom in the glow and brightness of the pretty room. On the death of her father, she had come to the house of her guardian, Mr. Arnold Silver. That was only three months ago; and she and Charles had employed the time in falling in love with each other—which would have been regarded as high treason by the authorities, and the young people knew it.

She heard Charles Silver's step; and a slight quiver ran through her slender frame, and a dusky rose crept into her lovely face; but she did not turn until he touched her arm very lightly. Then she slowly moved her eyes to his handsome young face. He was very like Violet, only that the brow was hardly so wide, or the outline of the chin at once so firm and delicate. It was a pleasant, lovable face, however, frank and bright, as the face of the young should be; but a shadow darkened it as Daisy Leighton's eyes met his. He drew back a little from her, her face was so full of fire, such a tempest of jealous rage lightened her dilated eyes. The fact was, things had been all at cross-purposes lately, and Daisy had caught up the idea that Charles had been only playing with her—that he had deserted her for his cousin.

Daisy rose, letting the roses fall in a mass to the carpet. She flung out her little hand, as though appealing against him.

"Traitor!" she said, between her little white teeth, "coward and traitor! I saw you with her by the fountain."

Charlie's dark blue eyes assumed a look of mingled anger and perplexity.

"Upon my word, Daisy!" he said in a low tone, "what next? I am quite tired of these fits of temper. Is it jealousy?—of Violet? What a silly child you are!"

She looked at him with a singular smile, her dark face paling to the very lips. Charles took her hands tenderly in his: he stooped until his brown hair touched hers. There could be no mistake made by any spectator then as to where his true love was given.

And, unfortunately, there was a spectator. His father had entered silently, and stood there in the shade of the large room, looking on.

Aurelius Silver was a stern-looking man, with a face such as one sees on an old Roman medal, and thick masses of sparkling silver hair clustering round his lofty brow. One could imagine him that Roman who gave his son, fresh from a glorious victory, to the sword of the executioner. His eagle eyes took in the agitation of Charles and Daisy at a glance: he saw how it was; and in his bitter anger, suppressing his furious passion, he stole away, to give vent to that passion out of doors, and to *think*.

The lovers had not perceived him. Charles, indeed, was wholly taken up with Daisy. Never had he seen her like this before—and

he resented it: resented her want of confidence in him. It is true that he could not speak to any purpose—for he was not sure how events might turn out, or that Daisy could ever be his; and he was not one to fly in the face of a father's mandate. All *that* kept him from speaking. A sharpish quarrel ensued.

"Listen to me, Daisy," he said at length. "I cannot help myself just now, I am not my own master; but you may be sure ——"

No, she would not listen. Passion over-mastered her. She tore the little brown fingers from his grasp; and, with an inarticulate cry of emotional rage, sprang through the open window and fled out into the moonlight.

Charles would not go after her. His first thought was of Violet.

"I hope they'll not meet," he said to himself, as he stood outside the glass doors. "They might come to an issue if they did, in Daisy's present temper. What in the world possesses her?"

At that moment, as he looked out across the moonlit lawn, it seemed as though a cry came to his ears from the direction of the lake. He listened; but it was not repeated. And just then Violet came swiftly towards him from an opposite direction, tall and white as a spirit, in her fluttering, misty dress.

CHAPTER II.

AU REVOIR.

Mr. Silver, in his icy rage, strode out into the moonlight at a sharp pace, taking the direction of the lake. The scene he had just witnessed, the knowledge that had burst upon him, filled his whole soul with the intensest wrath. For years and years it had been his darling wish to see his son and niece united: not more for the sake of uniting the large fortune of the Brothers Silver, than because he so loved Violet.

He loved his son with a great love, and he coveted Violet for him. There had been another son once, but he "was not:" one many years older than Charles: Charles alone remained to him, and on him was concentrated all his affection. Just at the point when success had crowned his wishes—for his brother Arnold had, this very self-same evening, given consent to the marriage—it was maddening to find his airy fabric of Hope dashed to the ground by the glancing wing of the bright little creature who had flitted so inopportunely across his path. "Why," he said to himself, as his black shadow swiftly traversed the pearly light, bathing the emerald slope of the lawn, "I could crush her with a touch! And yet I foresee as exhausting a conflict with her as with a simoom in the desert, and perhaps as hopeless. Charles, too! But I don't so much blame him. She has bewitched him. I wish she had never come here!"

A grim smile darkened, rather than brightened, his majestic face,

and he closed his iron lips until the fine curves of the resolute mouth were lost in one firm bar, as unyielding as death itself. Onwards he strode, his step fiercer and more fierce.

"Daisy Leighton must be got rid of," he continued, silently. "I have never yielded a jot of my will yet to mortal, and it would be strange, indeed, if the folly of a boy and girl should turn me aside from the purpose of my life—that of joining the house and fortune of my brother with my own. Yes; I must disclose to Arnold what I have discovered, and get him to appoint some other home for her."

A narrow path led him through the grove of willows to the border of the lake. It was darker here: the trees hid the moon. Mr. Silver was no longer angry. He had taken his rage by the throat and planted his foot upon it, after the fashion he had followed with Fate itself in his busy life. He was even a little amused with himself for his brief passion. "One would almost imagine it a thing of consequence," he said to himself; "the poor young simpletons! It is only boy and girl fancy."

Pushing aside the screen of drooping willow boughs, he was about to step downwards on the little beach, glistening with its golden sand under the moonbeams, when, as though stung by an adder, he drew back into the impenetrable shade of the clustering trees, amid which his face gleamed as though hewn from ivory. All his fierce anger had gathered again, its intensity nearly paralysing him. But for that, he would immediately have revealed himself: his haughty spirit spurned the idea of spying on the actions of others.

A light boat trembled on the edge of the water lower down, partially shaded by the overhanging willow-branches. In it stood a man, young and handsome, as it seemed to him,—a man with a black beard and moustache, who was pushing it out from the shore. As Mr. Silver looked, it freed itself from the tiny beach, and tossed on the long, purple, voiceless swell of the lake. The man turned his dark, handsome face, his lustrous eyes, to the shore.

"Good-bye, my love!" he said in a low and cautious voice: and a white-robed girl kissed both her hands to him, her deep eyes radiant, her rosy lips quivering and smiling. It was Violet Silver.

"*Au revoir:* not good-bye," she whispered. "Go—oh, go! I think I hear footsteps!"

She turned and fled quickly towards the house, her golden hair and her white dress drifting out behind her like a vapour. And the man, with a long, powerful stroke of his oar, swept along under the bank; and, turning the sharp curve there, was lost to sight.

Aurelius Silver drew a heavy breath, which almost seemed to tear the muscles of his vast chest; and, with the port of a Cæsar defied by rebellious Helots, parted the screen of willows and stepped out on the fairy beach, baring his lofty brow as he did so to the freshening wind,

which was stealing across the lake, leaving footprints of faintest foam as it came. A complication had arisen which, in one glance, he saw could hardly fail of ruining his hopes, unless indeed his action was prompt, vigorous, and—unsparing. And of all men who ever tore the golden prize from the hand of Fortune, Aurelius Silver knew how to be unsparing to others and to himself. He had rarely done a generous deed, but he had never done a dishonourable one. Some natures resemble masses of grim rock threaded with veins of gold, but to the cold walls of which no tender parasite clings, no vine of beauty connects them with the warmth and sunshine of human life. Mr. Silver neither gave nor expected sympathy. He had his virtues; but they were of the high Roman sort. He was honourable, he was temperate, he was courageous. The hidden fire which lurks in man, as in nature, was there, but it neither brightened his life nor that of others.

"So!" he said, with a deep breath. "Violet also!"

The expression of his face boded but little good towards the girl. She was the only creature he had permitted himself to love, Charles excepted; and for the very reason that she was dear to him, he absolutely hated her in this moment, when he found her young spirit had freed itself from the shackles of his will.

Turning to the left, he walked along the edge of the bank. The strip of beach below dwindled to a mere golden thread. The lake was very deep just here. Aurelius Silver glanced back at his brother's house. Against the lights in the drawing-room beyond the rose garden, the fountain threw up its diamond spray; and, against it again, a little black form seemed to be rushing down frantically like a phantom. It was Daisy Leighton. She was coming towards where Mr. Silver stood; and all his dreadful anger was again aroused as he recognized her.

It all passed in a moment. Whether the girl could not stop herself in time; whether her foot slipped at the bank's edge; or whether in her uncontrollable passion she flung herself forward, could not be told; but there she was, in the lake below, just beneath Aurelius Silver.

One wild cry, one glimpse of her ghastly little face and flashing eyes; one short, sharp struggle with the treacherous water; and then all was still as before, save that widening rings of silver chased each other out across the lake, and drove its waters lapping in sudden life over the belt of sand.

A mighty shudder ran through the vast frame of Aurelius Silver. He was a strong swimmer: what ailed him that he made no effort to save the distraught child from the grave she had fallen into? In that moment, a demon spoke to his soul. "Oh, man, why trouble thyself? Fate has crushed this one obstacle out of thy path. Make her evil thy good."

Was there a despairing voice abroad, sighing through the pines and

across the purple, silver-crested swells of the lake, sighing over the sudden fall of him who had walked well amongst men from the high throne of his boasted honour? Were the stars changed to orbs of fire and blood, as his burning eyes turned towards them?

With his silver hair lifting itself stifly from his head, with a hand of fire grasping his heart, with eyes that saw and ears that heard not, Aurelius Silver turned away from the lake.

CHAPTER III.

"LORD, KEEP MY MEMORY GREEN!"

An old stone house standing outside a town at least a hundred miles away from the beautiful summer villa of Arnold Silver. A house standing back from the highway and flanked with great dark trees, old and weird-looking as those in Gustave Doré's picture of the "Hewing of the Cedars for the Temple." The mansion itself lay square, massive, low-browed; its walls were of granite, with that faint suggestion of rose and aqua-marine flowing through the stone, which renders some of those old buildings so mellow and picturesque. The windows were small and formal; the chimneys, standing up against the sky, cowled and hooded like hermits on a mountain top; and from the great eaves, giant lances of diamond, the handiwork of the fairy armourer King Frost, were hanging like the spears of Titans in some enchanted land. A carriage-drive swept round from the great gates of sombre bronze to the stone step, guarded on either side by a stone lion couchant, of an amiable, not to say benevolent aspect. A hall-door of polished oak stood hospitably open in the winter's sun.

This was the home of the elder brother, Aurelius Silver. It was the custom of the two families to spend the winter together here, and the summer at the villa of the younger, Arnold.

But they had quitted the villa earlier than usual this year. There was a certain night in August that had struck its inmates with perplexity, if not terror. Margaret Leighton—or Daisy, as they fondly called her—had disappeared. After a quarrel with Charles—he had confessed to that—she tore from him in a little tempest of fury. Only to the garden, as he supposed, to cool herself by the fountain, or amid the roses: but she had never come back again. From that mysterious hour she had disappeared. Charles and Violet had remained together in the drawing-room talking; talking, and waiting for her to make her appearance; how long they scarcely knew. But she did not come. Mr. Arnold Silver had gone to rest straight from the dinner-table that night, not being well. Mr Silver (Aurelius) had chanced to take a long country walk that night: the night was so fine that it had tempted him, he told them when he came in—and that was not until close upon midnight. Where was Daisy, they asked him—for Charles and Violet

had taken up the notion that the two absent ones must be strolling about together. Daisy? retorted Mr. Silver, at the question—what should he know about Daisy? But that he caught up some alarm in regard to her was evident, for his face turned strangely pale.

Well, from that hour, no trace of Daisy had been found. The family and the servants were searching about all night, Charles in a distracted state, but they did not find her. They never had found her. What her fate was, could not be conjectured with any certainty: some thought she had run away; others cast dim fears towards the lake. Aurelius Silver never enlightened them, nor told a hint of the grave secret the lake might have disclosed.

And when all search was abandoned as hopeless, they had quitted the villa, which somehow seemed full of discomfort, for the distant winter mansion. And the weeks had gone on, and this was Christmas Eve. Little more had been said about the union of the two cousins: even Mr. Silver no longer urged it.

In the dining-room of this fine old house sat Violet Silver, making wreaths of holly and ivy. The walls were panelled with oak, richly brown and lustrous, tossing to and fro in their shining depths the scarlet leapings and writhings of the great fire burning on the hearth, lordly logs like prostrate pillars of carbuncle, glowing ruddily and filling the room with a rosy illumination. The ceiling was painted with a gorgeously-hued picture of Jove banqueting, squired by a golden-haired Ganymede, while his eagles plumed their pinions at his feet.

A mighty buffet of Spanish oak, a mass of rare carving, and antique enough in appearance to have been taken from the "rich, dim city" which Merlin waved into existence with his wand, bore an array of silver plate, rich, rare, and old, catching the firelight with fine effect on fretted wreath and grinning griffin head, the crest of the family. For the rest, a great dining-table and vast chairs of oak and ruby velvet, a grim portrait or two on the wall, ancient Silvers, as might be seen by the handsome features; and Violet in a blue cashmere dress. Mourning had not been put on for Daisy. Arnold Silver would not hear of it: he refused to believe that she was dead.

Violet sighed as she worked. The girl's face was changed in some subtle way since that night we saw her by the fountain. A shade more pensive, a thought less radiant, the eyes deeper in expression, the lips parting less readily in laughter and speech: such was the change. The same change, but intensified a hundredfold, was repeated in Charlie Silver's countenance. He sat near her: watching in silence her long, rosy fingers as they twined the emerald sprays into a long, clustering wreath, flecked here and there with the fire of scarlet berries, dug from beneath the white drifts in the woods.

His faced was indescribably changed. The features were sharper,

the glance of the eye firmer, the lines of the mouth and chin more resolute and decided. The face, which had been like Violet's, had developed more into a resemblance to Aurelius Silver. A gracious likeness, though; retaining what was finest and noblest in the older face, yet lacking the cold and commanding expression which gleamed icily in its large and stern eyes.

There were lines in Charlie's forehead now. Four months previously he had hardly looked his age; now he looked ten years older.

"Charlie, how idle you are!" said Violet, breaking a long pause. "Hand me some more sprays of holly, please. There, how do you like my wreath?"

"Very well," said Charlie, listlessly obeying the mandate. "What a pretty Idyll of Christmas Eve you make, Violet," he added, looking at her. "You have a gracious beauty about you, such as the spirit of the day should have."

"Thanks! I like compliments," said Violet, very sincerely. "You are as good-looking as I am, Charlie; and this wreath is destined to frame our great-grandmother yonder. How droll she looks in that powdered wig and brocaded dress, simpering at her woolly flock! What flourishing ideas of Arcadia those dear old people must have had!"

The wreath was finished. Charles Silver called for some steps, and mounted to festoon the wreath round the massive old frame of the portrait, which hung over the carved mantelpiece. Violet stood by to watch him. There was an unusual sadness in both of them to-day, for they were about to separate. She resumed her seat, and began another wreath.

"I always detest the perfume of this burning wood," she exclaimed impatiently, as Charles came back to his chair. "Do you know, if Uncle Aurelius hadn't developed an extraordinary enthusiasm for Christmas decorations, I should not have had the heart to undertake them this year."

"I can imagine that," said Charles, quietly.

"Your going away is the worst of all, Charlie."

"It is very pleasant to know that I shall have some one to think kindly and lovingly of me when I am away," he observed. "I can quite understand that quaint old prayer, 'Lord, keep my memory green!'"

"Charlie!" said Violet, with startled eyes, "you speak as if you never meant to return to us! Surely you are not going from us with that idea in your mind? Think of your father."

"Think of you all, you mean, Violet," he answered, sadly. "I cannot control fate, child. An impression seems to lie on my mind that I may never return."

"Then why, oh! why do you go?"

"I must go, Violet: I cannot rest here. Every hour I am reminded

of *her*. There's nothing for me but change. Heaven above knows how I loved her, and what her strange loss has been to me!"

Violet's hot tears fell on the wreath. But she dashed them away with her hand, and looked at him hopefully.

"Time," she said, "will bring its cure. You are so very young, Charlie!"

"Not too young 'to keep my memory green,'" he said, repeating his former words softly. "In time, in time, I may come back again, dear. You will be a happy wife then, with children about your knees."

He rose as he spoke and left the room, wishing her good-bye until dinner-time. She worked on soberly until her wreaths were finished, and then went up to her chamber, carrying some sprays of holly with her that her maid was to dispose of on her white dinner dress.

But Violet was very restless. She knew why. A task, which she had undertaken, was to be performed that evening; and she knew not whether it would turn out for good or for ill.

"I had thought to have Daisy with me this Christmas," she sighed softly to herself. "Oh, what was become of her? Is she in death, or in life?"

Her thoughts were becoming painful. Quitting her chamber, she went downstairs again. The great square hall had its Christmas draperies of green wreaths and holly-berries; and was flooded with the crimson firelight from its wide hearth. Violet drew back into the shade to admire the effect of the decorations, which had been done by the servants.

Suddenly the house was startled by a shriek, and a cry, and a fall. Servants and others rushed into the hall, whence it came, and there found Violet. She lay on the floor, like an image of snow, perfectly unconscious, a look of intensest horror frozen on her lovely face.

"I never knew her to faint before," said Arnold Silver, quaking in every limb, as Aurelius lifted her from the ground, and carried her into the dining-room. "My darling! What can have happened?"

"Nothing," said Aurelius, quietly. "Because she never has fainted, there is no reason that she should not do so. Violet has not seemed herself of late."

He laid her very tenderly and gently on a couch, touching her cheek caressingly with his fingers as he did so.

"She is reviving," he said quietly. "Stand back, Arnold. Give her air."

"My precious one, what was it?" questioned her father. "Were you alarmed by anything?"

"Oh! father, I don't know what it was," wailed Violet. "I—I think I must have fallen into a dream. If you will take me up to my room, I'll lie down till dinner-time."

Arnold Silver took her, and charged her maid not to leave the chamber.

CHAPTER IV.

VIOLET'S STORY.

"AND so, it being Christmas Eve," said Violet, "and just our own four selves here, I will tell you a story."

It was after dinner. The dessert was on the table: wine flushing redly, a glow of rare exotics in a great silver basket, fruit blushing in dainty Sèvres dishes. Saucy pages of the same priceless ware held aloft baskets of grapes, glistening like amethysts and emeralds in the wax lights.

The Silvers had drawn from the table and were gathered round the fire, which burned royally, as a Christmas fire should. In its full glow sat Violet at her father's feet, looking, in her white robes with their dainty green and red sprays, like a lovely Idyll of the season, as Charles had phrased it. She was quite herself again, had apparently forgotten the fainting fit and its cause; and the holly-berries, gleaming in the glossy coronal of her golden hair, were not more vividly crimson than her cheeks and lips. Her eyes were starry, shining, dilated, wonderful in their rapid changes of expression, as she glanced from one to the other of the group. She looked at Aurelius Silver, as he sat on the opposite side of the hearth, his noble face and head thrown finely out by the ruby velvet back of the deep chair in which he sat, and she smiled as she spoke. She held in her hand a fan of white feathers, the handle of rubies and dead gold, and when she drooped her head, its shade fell across her face.

"A story!" said her father, smiling. "And why not, my dear? It is a time-honoured custom at Christmas-tide. Do you remember, Aurelius, how our poor father and mother used to tell us youngsters Christmas tales, in this very room?"

"I remember," said Aurelius Silver, quietly.

"And how we had Mère Margaton's tales of the Loup-Garou and Feu-follet, in the nursery?" continued Arnold, "and how frightened I used to be? *You* were not. You never feared anything during the whole course of your existence, I do believe, Aurelius."

Aurelius Silver started very slightly, and looked at his brother; but his answer was spoken in his usual composed tones.

"Let us hear Violet's story, by all means. It is not likely to be very fearful, is it, Pussy?"

"No," cried Violet, eagerly, "it is a story about people like ourselves. There could be nothing very fearful about *us*, for instance; could there, Uncle Aurelius?"

"No," said Aurelius, smiling strangely, as he looked into the fire. "We are anciently respectable, commonplace members of the community. Far above comment. Infinitely beyond temptation."

"Go on, Violet," said Charles, breaking the silence and glancing at his father, whose voice had a curious ring in it. Indeed, of late, a certain strangeness had crept into the life and manners of Aurelius Silver, which those about him had not failed to notice and wonder at.

Until this winter, Arnold Silver had been alone in the almost princely benevolence which had made the name of Silver revered and blest amid the poor: but lately the elder brother had outdone him in generosity. If possible he was quieter, more reticent than ever, though at times a strange disturbance seemed to reign in his soul, and he would retire from the society of the family, remaining secluded for many hours at a stretch in his library. Who shall say what phantom of remorse sat by his board, visible but to himself? Who shall tell the anguish of such a soul as his, reflecting on the moment of temptation which had been sufficient to hurl from its high place of arrogant security that cold and jealous integrity, that stern rectitude and honour, which he had erected into a deity and bowed the knee to idolatrously? Its crest had towered to the skies, its feet of clay were on the shifting sands. There be no such mighty Iconoclast for your idol of self-security, as temptation; a truth Aurelius Silver had waded through a sea of fire to learn and understand.

How often the memory of that starlit and peaceful night, when he had turned his back upon the lake, and on one drowning there, had flashed upon his remorseful soul! The secret of that temptation lay buried within his own breast; buried, he hoped, for ever. This Upas-tree memory had borne some good fruit. When he found Charles firm as a rock in his determination to remain faithful to the memory of Daisy Leighton, he had not urged him to break that determination, or threatened, or disowned him, as most assuredly he would have once done. He had not even opposed his son's projected departure, which was to take place at the New Year, but quietly watched the preparations for it.

"Wait until the year is out," he had said to Charles, emphatically and firmly. "If you retain the same mind then, I will say no more. But until then, stay where you are. You are very young, Charles, and youth is the changeful April time of a man's life. Wait."

And Charles had waited, but he had not changed at all. He meant to go as soon as the New Year came in. He meant to remain true to Daisy Leighton; and through his soul there ever rang an appealing and plaintive voice, "Keep my memory green!"

"Papa!" said Violet, putting her hand on her father's, and turning her wistful eyes to his, "in my story there is a girl, like me, and perhaps you will think her wicked and ungrateful to her father, who is just like you; but you will hear all about her quite to the end before you say so. Won't you, papa?"

"If she is like my little girl, she can't be *very* bad;" said Arnold

Silver, laughing proudly, and patting her pretty hand. "Go on, my dear, we are all anxiety to hear this tale."

Violet turned her face from theirs, clasped her hands on her lap, and fixed her eyes musingly on the leaping amethyst and molten gold of the flames, licking the great sides of the logs on the huge andirons, and began her tale. In her voice there was something strangely timorous, just as though she feared to tell it.

"Some years ago, there were two brothers, partners in a great business, just, papa, as you and Uncle Aurelius are; and one of them had two sons, and the other only one little child, a girl; and the two mothers were dead. Now, the elder brother, the father of the two boys, was a strange man, cold and haughty and like iron in everything he said and did; and when his wife died—he was very fond of her—he ——"

"What are you telling?" interrupted Mr. Silver.

"Hear me to the end, please, Uncle Aurelius."

"Yes, yes, the tale must be heard to the end," put in Arnold Silver. And Violet went on.

"This elder brother grew colder and harder, though I know it was only pride; in his heart he was good. His eldest son, who was many years older than the other, waslike the dear mother who had died, and a generous high-spirited lad, and I am *quite* sure all the time the father hardly seemed to know he had a son: he was proud and fond of his boy, only it was not his way to show his heart to the world. But he must have loved him. Don't you think so, papa?"

"I suppose so, Pussy," said Arnold Silver, very soberly, and looking straight at the fire. Aurelius never spoke. His face lay in the shadow cast by the marble pillars of the mantelpiece. Violet glanced at him. Her eyes were very bright; her sweet young voice was steady and clear as silver as she resumed her story.

"How much that poor young man was to be pitied!—that firstborn son! He was left so much to himself: his father was so absorbed in his own business that he had no time to see the evil which was gathering around the lad—and he was only eighteen. Had he seen it, he would have been so angry that he might not have moved a finger to save him. Not that he meant to be cruel; you must not think that for a moment: but he said and thought that, for a truly honourable and upright nature, there could be no such thing as temptation."

Aurelius Silver winced: and drew his face further into the shade.

"He said that those who fell, fell from inclination; and as they fell, so, for him, should they lie. For it had come about that his son had done something very, very wrong about money matters: that he might have been tried for. Are you listening, papa?"

Arnold Silver slightly nodded, but spoke not. He was looking as though he did not much like the tale.

"Well, the boy's father quietly turned him adrift, 'to herd,' as he said, 'with the dregs of the earth his crime had levelled him to.' He was cold and impassive still, as I have heard. I don't believe he even *seemed* angry: but none of us can fancy what he felt in his secret soul. He *must* have thought that, perhaps, if he had acted differently himself, watched and guarded the boy from corrupt influences, this would not have happened: and oh, how dreadful that thought must have been! But the boy disappeared."

"And thus your story ends," said Aurelius Silver impatiently, as though he wished it over.

"No, Uncle Aurelius, it has a sequel. Had it ended there, I should never have told it. Perhaps never have known it."

"Go on, Violet," said Charles, who was staring at her with all the earnestness of his deep-blue eyes.

"The son went on board ship, and escaped to another country. There he turned over a new leaf, and began to work in earnest. It was California—where fortunes are to be made for the trying. He had a great and a good heart, this son, and it carried him on eagle wings, far above the associations, such as they were, of his former life. For years he battled on manfully, and he gained fortune; and in the faint hope that his father had forgotten all but that he was his eldest son, he turned his steps homeward and came back over the seas."

Violet stopped; it seemed from emotion. Her cheeks were flushing and paling.

"He came back safely, this son, and went to his own home; not openly, but cautiously; in secret, that is. There he met his cousin, now a woman grown, how it does not matter; and oh! papa, she was very, very like me; but don't begin to hate her just yet: and he begged that she would try to soften his father toward him; and, from one thing to another, the girl and he got to—to love each other better than all the world. They met very often, but he had to go away up to town about his affairs more than once, and while he was there the last time, the family went away from their pretty summer villa; and he and she did not meet again until a few days ago. And she promised and promised to beg his father to forgive him; but she was such a coward," cried Violet, bursting into tears, "as well as such a wicked, deceitful thing to her own father, who was the best and dearest in the whole wide world, that she put off speaking until Christmas Eve: and, oh! uncle, that's—that's the story, and you must finish it."

Violet turned, fell into her father's arms, which folded tightly about her, and hid her face amid the ruffles decorating his expansive chest.

"Aurelius Silver," said Arnold, solemnly, as Violet trembled in his arms, "I charge you to finish it as your heart and conscience urge you to do. I gather that the young man is here. Dear Aurie!—as we used to call him. Remember how we loved him!"

A peculiar smile, gracious yet shadowed, crossed the lofty face o Aurelius Silver. He rose and came toward them.

"Doubly my daughter!" he said, taking Violet into his arms, and kissing her pure, young brow: "the good Angel of this Christmas Eve. You shall finish your Christmas tale as you will."

"Papa, dear," cried Violet, the tears dropping, "tell me that you don't hate me for my dreadful deceit. I could not help it; indeed I could not."

"I shall get over it in time, I daresay, Pussy," replied he with twinkling eyes. "Did you know of this, Charles?"

"Partly," replied Charles. "I did not know until now that he was my brother. To say the truth, I thought the affair was over and done with. I will go and find him."

They came back arm in arm. A man with dark lustrous eyes and the kingly port of the Silvers, but with a face all his own and his dead mother's. Such was Aurelius the younger. Violet stood by her father. her eyes glistening. Mr. Silver, showing more emotion than anyone would have believed, clasped his son's outstretched hands.

"Welcome home, my boy," he whispered. And, retaining still the hands, he turned to his brother.

"Arnold," he said, "where is your welcome?"

"Here," replied Arnold Silver, taking Violet's rosy hand and placing it in his nephew's: "one more expressive than words."

"A good gift!" said Aurelius Silver, musingly. "It is but exchang ing one brother for the other. She was to have been yours, Charles."

"She and I never thought that, father."

"Your brother is leaving us—for California, or elsewhere," said Mr. Silver to his new-found son. "Possibly you may have heard of it—and its cause?"

"Yes," was the answer, given in a tone of sad sympathy. "Perhaps Charlie will stay here, though, now I am come."

There was a moment's pause. Mr. Silver broke it.

"Violet, as Charles's promised bride, I bought you a set of jewels. As the betrothed of my son Aurelius, I should like to clasp them on your neck and arms."

"Oh, uncle, thank you—thank you!" was Violet's impulsive answer. "How good you are! How good everyone is!"

Mr. Silver left the room, to fetch, as was supposed, the promised jewels. But he seemed rather long about it. Violet was talking to Charles when he returned, her eyes pitiful.

"This Christmas has held nothing for you," she said; "it is very sad."

"Except a darling sister and brother," said Charlie, clasping her hands in his.

"And wife!" said the voice of Aurelius Silver behind them.

They turned their faces to him, in a silence born of awe,—a pallid silence, through which Violet's voice rang out in wild exultation.

"Daisy! Oh, Charlie, this was the ghost I saw to-day! She was looking out of that private room of my uncle's, and I thought it was a real ghost, and fainted away. I was ashamed to confess it afterwards: I supposed I must have been in a dream."

Aurelius Silver stood towering like some lofty column, crested with sparkling snow; and by his side a dark and beautiful little creature, whose wide and speaking eyes were fixed on Charles's face.

"Take her," said Mr. Silver to his son Charles. "She is yours. When she fell into the lake—for that was the cause of her disappearance, her eyesight no doubt deceiving her—I was close at hand, and fortunately was enabled to save her ——"

"Do you mean you got her out, Uncle Aurelius?" interrupted Violet, in her eagerness.

"Yes, I got her out."

"But why did you not bring her home?"

"She was quite insensible: and I thought she would recover better in the gamekeeper's cottage; and so I conveyed her thither. She had an illness after that—a fever. For some weeks she was not herself; and the gamekeeper's wife attended on her. I enjoined silence on them. Before she at all recovered, we left the villa for this place."

"But, uncle, *why* did you not tell us? Why have let us suffer all that suspense and distress?"

"I had my reasons for it," calmly replied Mr. Silver. "For one thing, I wished to see what Charles's professed love for her really was: whether it would last, or was but ephemeral, as a butterfly's summer day. She is here now, and you may make the most of her."

"He has been as a dear father to me," whispered Daisy, with tears in her eyes. "As a dear, loving, generous father. Oh, you cannot think how good he is: and we used to think him so proud and stern!"

It had been all as Mr. Silver said. No sooner had he turned his back upon the lake that night, than the awful wickedness of his conduct flashed over him in blood-red colours. With a half-breathed prayer for forgiveness he rushed back, and rescued Daisy. She could not be said to have quite recovered yet; but he had caused her to be brought to them here, had smuggled her into the house that afternoon at dusk, that she might take her place once more amid them this Christmas Eve. But he never supposed there was a surprise in store for himself as well as for them—in the restoration of his elder son. He had believed him to be dead: and it was perhaps the distress of his loss, the self-reproach for his own conduct, that had rendered him in manner so hard and stern. The sternness would give place now to loving generosity. Truly, God had been very good to him!

"Do you like them, Arnold?"

He turned Violet to face her father, the brilliant diamonds gleaming on her neck, in her ears, on her fair arms; flashing, costly, priceless gems, worth almost a king's ransom.

"Aurelius! how extravagant you have been! How could you spend so much on mere ornaments?"

"It seems to me, Arnold, that I could spend the whole of my fortune this night, and not regret it."

"In thankfulness for Aurie's safety?"

"I have a deeper cause for thankfulness than even that," was the answer. "None will ever know how deep, save God!"

"And, Charles, I suppose you will give up your sea-going trip?"

"I expect I shall, Uncle Arnold."

"You'll have to forfeit your passage-money, young sir."

"I'll put the receipt for it up to auction and sell it to the highest bidder," retorted Charles, a laughing happiness in his eyes that had long been absent from them.

The silvery-toned clock on the mantel-piece, rang out twelve. Violet turned to look at it, her diamonds flashing.

"*Midnight!*" she exclaimed with surprise. "Who ever would have thought it could be so late? Why, this is Christmas morning! What a happy Christmas Eve it has been!"

"A merry Christmas to us all, my dear ones!" spoke Aurelius Silver with emotion; "to you especially, Daisy, and to you, my new-found son God has been so merciful to us in this past year: so merciful! It might have been a worse Christmas than any of you can dream of. Hark! there are the bells."

THE DAY OF DEATH.

Oh, pleasant day of rest!
Oh, day so calm and blest,
When greyer grows the light upon the hill!
When songs resound no more
From childhood's sunny shore,
And the sparkle vanishes from pleasure's rill!

Oh, day of labour done!
Oh, golden set of sun,
When calmly we look back upon our toil!
When fever frets are o'er,
When pain can hurt no more,
And joy's sweet rose fades in its earthy soil!

Oh, day so fleet and fair!
Oh, end of ceaseless care,
That frowns upon us from a sullen shore!
The day of tender doom
That smiles from out the gloom
Is fairer far than all that went before.

MISTLETOE.

THE romance of the Mistletoe-Bough !—who is there that does not understand it? Who that has not many memories connected with that curiously-shaped, pale-coloured leaf, with its firm, alabaster-like berries? Who cannot recall a time when the very name of Mistletoe had in it something of mysterious delight; when the hanging up of the Mistletoe-Bough was the acknowledged signal for more than ordinary joyousness and mirth, belonging as it did, exclusively to Christmas-tide: proclaiming that Christmas—long-expected, "Merry Christmas"—had actually arrived: that "Father Christmas," that hoary-headed, much-loved patriarch, was already in our midst!

The ringing laughter of the children, the joyous schoolboy shout, the pattering of little feet; loving greetings, loving wishes, exchanged under its branches—what has it not heard? Is it strange that we should love it? Is it strange that the sight of it should set us elder ones musing, while the children still laugh and play beneath its shadows?

But to us there are other shadows mingling with its memories—the shadows which Time always throws upon the Past—tinging them, it may be, with sadness, toning down their radiancy, but leaving them still bright.

And these graver thoughts are not all of our own experiences; there are graver memories too clinging round those branches—sadder scenes on which the mistletoe has looked down. As our thoughts wander over the Past, we find ourselves slipping back, almost unconsciously, into far distant ages—into days of which we have only read, but which nevertheless find us matter enough for meditation, and reasons to thank God, to increase our gladness, and swell our Christmas Hymn of Praise.

And why? Listen to that wild sound rising from yonder barren, moonlit plain; hark how the discordant notes rise and clash against each other, like angry waves lashing some rocky coast; music it cannot be called, it is only noise; but there is an awful meaning in the din. Vehement shouts re-echo through the air, but they are shouts of a would-be *worship*—cries of a people on their unknown God, whose avenging wrath can, they think, only be propitiated by a hideous sacrifice. And, mingling with those shouts, comes ever and anon a bitter, agonizing wail, which now and then rises almost to a shriek; it is a human cry—the cry of despairing human victims, condemned to a cruel death!

See, yonder, winding along the plain, comes the solemn procession of priests, whose brows are encircled with leaves of the sacred oak, and whose white robes glisten in the moonlight. Thousands of worshippers swelling their train, and in their midst the victims, bound helplessly hand and foot. On and on the procession wends its way, till it turns out of the clear, calm moonlight into the deep gloom of a so-called sacred grove : a clustering group of oak-trees—sacred, alas ! to horrible Druid rites—whose thickly-knotted branches screen from the light of sun or moon deeds which are literally works of darkness, in which the " Prince of Darkness " only could delight.

Here, or rather at the entrance of the grove, the procession halts; for, on the foremost of these ancient trees, the Mistletoe has taken root ; and as the fostering oak is holy, the plant which it has nurtured becomes holy also, and a fitting object for religious veneration.

The worshippers range themselves around. Then, mid a solemn silence, the most aged of the priests mounts, and severs with a golden knife the plant which he fondly deems to be a gift direct from Heaven. It falls into the white robe of the priest, who stands below waiting thus reverently to receive it.

So far all is well. At least, the rites thus ignorantly performed are not cruel. But, alas ! this is but the mystic prelude to a more terrible reality. The blood of the victims must now be shed; the sacred grove must become a slaughter-house, and re-echo with the groans of the dying. And then will follow thanksgiving to the now propitiated Deities ; and wild, heathenish festivities.

And all this the Mistletoe-Bough has witnessed.

And now contrast with this another coming scene. Look down upon those fields, where, beneath the quiet glow of an Eastern sky, shepherds are watching over their flocks by night. The only sounds which break the silence of the air are the movements of the flock grazing peacefully in the moonlight. All else is still.

But see ! On yonder hillock where the shepherds have made their bivouac, a sudden light appears. Behold them starting eagerly to their feet, and then prostrating themselves in awe and wonder. What has happened? In the glory of that light has appeared a Heavenly Visitant, who has brought to them "glad tidings of great joy," and lo ! as he withdraws, a multitude of the Heavenly Host gather round ; the glowing light becomes radiant as burnished silver, and the music of angel-voices resounds among the hills. Softly, clearly, comes the chorus —heard now for the first time by mortal ears—" Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men !" Why? Because, as the Angel has said, " To you, and to all mankind, is born, this night, a Saviour—Christ the Lord ! "

To you is now revealed a Saviour's love ; to you is manifested that wondrous scheme, which, beginning in the secret counsels of an all-power-

ful but *all-loving* God, is now to be worked out and perfected for ever; and to become, for men and angels, the theme of never-ending adoration. Not by the sacrifice of His creatures; not by the shedding of human blood, will the One True God reconcile the world unto Himself. He is not a God whose fury must be appeased, whose favour may be purchased. The God of heaven and earth is a *loving* God, and by the sacrifice of *Himself* He will reconcile fallen man to his Creator. Peace, then, on earth—good will to men; and glory—from angels first, and then from all His ransomed hosts—glory to God in the highest!

What a change, from the ancient days of Druidism to the age of Christianity! Have we not, then, in looking on our Mistletoe-Bough, abundant reason for thankfulness to Him who has caused "a Light to spring up in a dark place," and has brought our beloved country out of "the shadow of death" into the "glorious liberty" of His gospel? And while we rightly exclude the mistletoe from our churches, as a reminder of heathen idolatry and superstition, we do well to give it place among our home decorations, as a venerable symbol of rejoicing, and a fitting memorial of the goodness which has been extended to our land.

And if, beside these graver thoughts, there came lighter, brighter memories—remembrances which we acknowledge as romantic, and yet fondly cherish—this also is not strange. For what marvel if the Mistletoe-Bough should diffuse romantic thoughts, when it is itself the very Offspring of Romance?

The Druids, when they found it growing on their Sacred Tree, believed the plant to have come direct from Heaven: and to the ancients generally its origin was scarcely less mysterious, for they affirmed it to be bred from seeds which had first passed through the processes of digestion in the stomach of a ring-dove or a thrush.

And in our day this tale is only thus far reduced: the Mistletoe is propagated by the missel-thrush, who feeds upon its berries; a part of the seed, clinging to the beak of the bird, is wetted off upon the trunk of a tree, and, where the wood is soft, readily takes root, adhering the most easily to smooth-rinded trees, such as the apple or the ash.

If the account thus given has gained in truth, it has surely scarcely lost in romance; and mystery, that boundless treasure-store for romantic minds, may still encircle one Christmas bough, and claim for the Mistletoe a distinguished place among our old-year memories.

FRANCES HILDYARD.

By the Author of "East Lynne."

A Story Re-told.

IT was the strangest and most beautiful sight in the world—certainly the most beautiful they had ever seen or dreamt of; and the party, after surmounting the perils of the ascent, stood gazing in astonished admiration. The Falls of Niagara may be very grand, observed they; not that they could speak from experience, never having crossed the Atlantic to view them; the sight of the Pyramids of Egypt worth a pilgrimage thither, and all the other known wonders of the earth, natural and artificial, equally imposing and sublime: but it was scarcely to be conceived that any one of them could vie in beauty with the Glaciers of Switzerland.

The party, some half-dozen in number, and of the English nation, had arrived at Chamouni in the night, later by some hours than they ought to have done, owing to the break-down of their char-a-banc just after they had quitted St. Martin: a quiet little village, whence the view of Mont Blanc is splendid in the extreme.

They were weary with travelling, and sought their beds at once: the earliest riser amongst them, John Rayner—and he not until the sun was up—rushing to his window, in the morning, before his eyes were half open, to see if any view was to be obtained.

He pulled aside the curtain, and stood transfixed; regardless of the glances that might be attracted upwards by the unusual apparition of a gentleman exhibiting himself at the open window in his costume de nuit, his tasseled nightcap stretching a yard into the air. But John Rayner was a man much accustomed to act upon impulse: and it is possible that in this instance the scene he beheld excused it.

The Glacier de Bosson was before him—the large, unbroken Glacier de Bosson—with its colour of bright azure, and its shining peaks of gold, rising to a sky more deeply blue than we ever see it in England, glittering along as far as the eye could reach. A glimpse of the Mer de Glace was caught in the distance, its white surface presenting a contrast to the blue of the glaciers.

Mr. Rayner soon summoned his party; and, after a hasty breakfast, they commenced preparations for a visit to the Mer de Glace. They were soon ready—considering that some of the party were ladies, and one of them a staid damsel of five-and-forty, methodical and slow; another was a fair young bride, indulged in every wish and whim. The usual appendage of mules and guides accompanied them, and they

were a long while ascending the mountain—five hours at the least—but the ascent was sufficiently exciting, and to some minds sufficiently dangerous, to keep away ennui. The young girl, too, and indeed she was little more, was perpetually throwing them into a state of agitation with her sudden screams of terror; although the guides, with their Alpenstocks, seeing her fears, were more attentive to her than to all the rest put together. Once they thought she had certainly gone over, mule and all: it was when a descending party appeared almost right above their heads, and she was just at a broken and rugged corner, where there was scarcely room for one mule to step, without being precipitated into the depths below. But the danger was surmounted; and on they went, the mules nearly on end: for it is scarcely possible to conceive a more perpendicular ascent. Part of the way lay through groves of tall pine-trees; flowers and wild strawberries were growing around, and might be plucked at will.

But now they gained the height, and how strangely beautiful was the scene that broke upon them!—it certainly, as the gazers observed, could have no rival in nature. The day was one of the sunniest days, too, that ever rose on that picturesque land: had it been less fine, the greater part of the scene's beauty would probably have been lost.

The azure-tinted plains of ice, in their rugged sublimity, were stretched out broad and large, their surface glittering as if all sorts of precious stones were thrown there. The bright-green emerald, the pale sapphire, the gay amber, the purer topaz, the sweet-tinted amethyst, the richer garnet, the blue turquoise, the darker lapis lazuli, the rare jacinth, the elegant onyx, the delicate opal, the gaudy gold, and the brilliant diamond. All gay and glittering colours were there, presenting a dazzling profusion of tints such as the eye had never yet rested on. Pinnacles of snow rose up to the heavens: and frozen torrents, arrested mid-way in their course, hung over the waves of ice below. Plains, plains of ice were extended there, clear and transparent; masses of white shining snow in all fanciful shapes were crowded, as if they were rocks, one above another; and magnificent pinnacles, or aiguilles, as they are appropriately termed, rose their golden tops to the dark-blue sky, numbers of them upon numbers, as far away in the distance as the eye could reach. It is impossible to do justice in description to the exquisite colouring of these heaps or rocks of ice, between each of which yawned a fissure or abyss fearful to look down upon. You may have witnessed the blue of a southern sky, and the richer blue of the Rhone's waters—wondrously dark and rich as they roll on from Geneva's lake; you may have seen the bright blue plumage of rare birds, rivalling the exquisite tint that is known as ultramarine; but never, never have you imagined anything so lovely as the transparent azure of portions of these masses of ice.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Hamlet tells us, than are

dreamt of in our philosophy. It is very probable; and there are certainly more places. When John Rayner's geographical master at school expounded to him the dreary, repellant attributes of the Icy Sea, making him shiver as he listened, he little thought there was *another* icy sea nearer home, one that he might sometime visit, and whose strangely magnificent beauty would cling to his recollections during all his future years.

The guides began pointing out to him some of the glistening peaks by name: the Aiguilles Rouges, the Col de Baume, the Grands Periades, the Grands Mulets, the Egralets, and others. And—strange, strange scene! in the midst of this region of petrifaction, this enduring ice of ages, the green banks, verdant as our plains in the spring-time, lay on the edge of the white waters; causing him to think of the blending of climes that he would never see blended—the smiling pastures of Arcadie in the midst of the desolation of the North Pole.

They gathered in a group close to the little châlet, as it is called, partaking of the refreshments that had been brought with them; all save that pretty plaything, the young bride. She, her terrors subsided, sat twisting some wood-strawberries round her straw hat, much to the staining and detriment of its white ribbons, as John Rayner's staid aunt kept assuring her, when some fresh comers appeared upon the scene. They consisted of a lady and gentleman, a man-servant in undress livery, and some guides. The gentleman was young and remarkably handsome, aristocratic to the last degree, and there was an air of reserve and hauteur about him, conspicuous at the first glance. But he was forgotten when his companion, whom he had assisted from her mule and placed upon his arm, turned her countenance to their view. Seldom has a human face been formed so classically faultless; and though there was not the slightest colouring in her features, the delicate beauty of their form was such, that, could a painter have transferred them to canvas, he would need to toil for fame no more. Her hair was of the deepest shade, next to black, and her eyes were blue. But such a blue! dark and lovely as were the edges of the masses of ice she was looking at. They did not advance towards our party, preferring, no doubt, to shroud themselves in their habits of reserve (as one of the said party remarked), and keep themselves aloof from promiscuous travellers. Once she withdrew her arm from his, and began slipping about on the waves of ice, trying hard to climb them; and, as she thus amused herself, he strolled away and approached nearer the other party. But he took no notice of it, save one or two involuntary glances of admiration which shot from his eyes as they fell upon the fair young wife before mentioned, who still sat weaving her strawberries; not quite consistent, as John Rayner's maiden aunt stiffly remarked, with his devotion to *his* young wife down there.

"I wonder if they are English?" quoth Miss Rayner—the first

"wonder" an Englishwoman expresses, and that invariably, when strangers appear in sight in a foreign land.

"English! of course not!" retorted John's wife, pushing up the wreath to see how many stains she could count upon her hat; and who, since she crossed the Channel, had been pleased to express a mania for everybody and everything that was foreign.

But the day at length wore away, with its pleasure, toil, and excitement; and not sorry were the Rayner party, after their perpendicular descent, to find themselves safe in the inn at Chamouni.

Early the next morning they went out to visit the source of the Arveyron; but it calls for little notice here, and its description would scarcely be read after that of the Icy Sea. They were standing by the grove of pines that skirts the rivulet, bargaining with some little children for the minerals they so anxiously displayed, when the same couple they had seen the day before amidst the glaciers advanced towards them; but this time quite unattended. The gentleman was attired in a sort of shooting coat, his tall slender form appearing to advantage in it; and the young lady was enveloped in a cashmere, her lovely features colourless as ever. But she hastily shook her veil over them as she neared the strangers.

They had scarcely passed, when the gentleman, in drawing something from his pocket—a sketch-book it looked like—let fall a gold pencil-case. Probably it was unperceived by him, and he continued his way, the pencil-case rolling to the feet of John Rayner. John picked it up; and, stepping after the stranger, returned it to his hand.

The stranger proffered his thanks politely and very courteously. There was something extremely prepossessing in his manner when he spoke; and in his smile also, in spite of the hauteur visible in his features when they were at rest.

"He is an Englishman, then!" cried John's good aunt, who had been watching and listening.

"And a nobleman to boot," added John.

On the blood-red stone of the chased pencil-case was engraved an elaborate coat of arms, surmounted by a viscount's coronet.

During their quiet journey back to St. Martin, in the char-à-banc, they, having nothing better to do, began discussing the episode, as John Rayner himself named it. Miss Rayner, who, many years before, had owned a real countess for a godmother, and still boasted of a cousin—she did not say how many degrees removed—in an ambassador's wife, had, as a matter of course, all the peerage at her fingers' ends, and knew the names and ages of everybody in it, as well as she did the Church Catechism. So she began speculating upon which of the peers' sons it was, and trying to recollect who amongst them had recently wedded.

"I have it!" she cried at last. "It is Lord L——. He was married

just before we left England—to that old admiral's daughter, you know, John, with the wooden leg; he is something at the Admiralty. An exceedingly fine young man is Viscount L——, but so was his father before him, though I dare say he is altered now. He stood for our county in early life, and I saw him ride round the town the day of his election."

"My good madam," interrupted a gentleman, leaning down from his seat by the driver to speak, "the man we saw this morning is just as much like Lord L—— as you are like me. He is a regular dwarf, is L——; stands five feet one in his boots."

"How do *you* know Lord L——?" snappishly demanded the lady, vexed at finding herself, with all her aristocratic lore, at fault.

"I was at Oxford with him," was the reply, as the speaker threw away the end of his cigar.

"It is useless to discuss the matter further," observed John Rayner. "We have seen the last of them, and the prospect here is worth all the viscounts in Europe."

They were leaving the Glacier de Bosson, with its form of grace, and its colour of brilliant blue shading itself off above to snowy whiteness; but shining cataracts, silvery and beautiful, were rushing down from the heights, amidst the trees, the rocks, and the green, green banks. And further on, as the char-à-banc continued its way out of the valley, the snowy range of mountains appeared, their outline sharply cut against the clear summer sky, the pinnacles, domes, and obelisks, as they might be fancied, shooting up to it; and Mont Blanc—Mont Blanc so splendidly radiant seen from thence, standing forth in all its glory.

II.

It may have been several months prior to the date of events recorded above, that a family party had gathered one evening in the drawing-room of a handsome house, in one of the mid-London squares. What is being related took place, as may be gathered, many years ago; and at that period the square was much inhabited by lawyers. Barristers also lived there.

A lady of advancing years sat in an easy chair; the worsted-work with which she had been occupied was thrown aside, and she had placed her hand fondly upon the head of a young girl, who knelt before the recently-lighted fire to enjoy its blaze, for the autumn evenings were growing chilly. A stranger would have been struck at once with the girl's beauty. Had a masterly hand sculptured her features from marble, they could not have been more exquisitely moulded, and they were pale as the purest ivory. She seemed to be about eighteen, and a cherished, petted child.

Two ladies, each considerably more than thirty years of age, sat also

in the drawing-room. They were quiet-looking women, dressed with a plainness which formed a contrast to the elegant attire of the girl. One sat before her desk; the other—having drawn close to the window, for she was near-sighted—sat reading attentively.

"Louisa, my dear," observed the mother, removing her hand from her youngest daughter's head to look across the room, "I think you should put your writing aside: it is getting too late to see."

"In a few minutes, mother: my epistle is just finished, and I wish to send it by to-night's post."

"Is it for the convent?" inquired the girl, half turning round from the fire."

"It is, Frances."

"As a matter of certainty," rejoined the young girl; a saucy smile—in which might be traced a dash of derision—illuminating her features.

The expression was observed, and a deep sigh broke from the writer. Frances was so reprehensively light—and was encouraged in it!

A servant came in with a note on a silver waiter, handing it to his mistress. Frances, spoiled child that she was, leaned her head upon her mother's knee to look up at the hand-writing.

"It is from your papa, my dearest, written from the office; but a couple of lines. He says he shall bring home a client to dinner—a nobleman's son, who will probably take a bed at our house. It may be as well, perhaps, to order some trifling additions to the table."

"The dinner is very well, madam," meekly observed one of her elder daughters. "It is handsome and good; will not the enlarging of it savour much of worldly vanity?"

"Additions! to be sure, mamma!" cried Frances, pulling the bell. "What are you dreaming of, Mary?—it is a nobleman who is coming. You would think eggs and parsley handsome,"—with a fling at the fare of the convent, that she was rather fond of making game of. "It is getting time to dress."

Mr. Hildyard was an eminent lawyer, ranking high in his profession, of unblemished character, and of great wealth. He was a gentleman of the old school, and of the Roman Catholic persuasion. His family consisted but of these three daughters. The two elder ones, Louisa and Mary, had been brought up in a convent; one of the strictest order in England. When they came out of it, women grown, they were far more fitted for its retired life than for the active duties of this bustling world. They were very good, very religious—but very bigoted. Seeing all things with the narrow-minded views that a long residence in a cloister necessarily imparts, the world with its daily doings was to them nothing less than a sin: and the most lamentable sin of it all was the way in which their young sister Frances was being reared; rendering her vain, idle, self-willed and self-indulgent. Her dresses alone, with

their lace and their flounces, their gay colours and their costly fabrics, were in themselves a little sin in the sight of these elder and sober women; the evening entertainments at which Frances appeared, at home or out, were worse. The child had no more religion in her, or reverence for religion, than a young Hottentot; and the sisters prayed day and night on their knees for her conversion.

For, though excellent people in a moral point of view, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Hildyard could be called actively or passively religious. He was completely absorbed in his profession; she in social pleasures and in the care of Frances. Most passionately fond of this child, coming to them so many years after the birth of the others, were Mr. and Mrs. Hildyard; and, like too many fond parents, they merged her future well-being in present indulgence. Oh! better had it been for Frances Hildyard to have subdued to marble her heart's best feelings, and to have lived a life of contented gloom, as her sisters did, than to have grown up the vain, self-willed girl which she had done, revelling in the world and its vanities as if it were to be her resting-place for ever!

It is impossible to tell you how Frances Hildyard was idolised—how indulged. This is no ideal story, and I speak but of things as they were. When only seven years of age, she dined at table with her parents, at their late dinner-hour. Her will was law in the house; the very servants, taking their tone from their superiors, made her their idol, or professed to do so. The most insidious flatteries were poured into her ear, and every hour in the day one eagerly drunk-in theme was whispered there—the beauty of Miss Frances. This indulgence, coupled with that fostered vanity, brought forth its fruits—and can you wonder at it? Good seeds were in her heart,—good, holy seeds, planted in it by God, as they are in the heart of all; but, in lieu of being carefully fostered and pruned, they were let run to waste, and the baneful weeds overgrew them.

A governess was provided for her, a kind, judicious Catholic woman. Send Frances to the convent, indeed! What object would Mr. and Mrs. Hildyard have had to dote upon had their precious child been removed from their sight? Mrs. Mainwaring was anxious for the welfare of her charge, and to do her duty; but Frances was the most rebellious pupil. The governess appealed to the mother; and Mrs. Hildyard, with showers of kisses and presents, implored Frances to be more attentive; but Frances heard her whisper to the governess not to be harsh with her darling child. It was a continual scene of struggle for mastery: and Mrs. Mainwaring threw up her engagement. A French lady was procured in her place, who had the accommodation, to use no more reprehensible term, to assimilate her views to those of Miss Frances. And so she grew up; her extreme beauty palliating to the household all her little wilful faults, and the admiration she excited filling the very crevices of her heart. To hear the echo of the word "beautiful"

coupled with Frances Hildyard was of itself, to her, worth living for. But soon one was to come, for whose admiration she would alone care, one for whose step she would learn to listen, and in whose absence existence would be a blank.

Meanwhile, during all these years, an under-current of warfare had existed between Frances and her sisters. It was sure to be so. They opposed little checks to her in all ways, or strove to do it; to her visiting, to her gay attire, to her pride and wilfulness; honestly praying to be guided in doing it, and believing that the mission had been given to them to save her soul. Frances, never before thwarted in her life, was outrageously indignant; and, just to spite them, made herself out to be worse—that is, to have less religion—than she really was. Mary, the second daughter, nearly gave up the contest in sheer despair; Louisa would never give it up but with life. They both loved Frances dearly, and were acting, as they sincerely thought, for her best welfare.

And now we will return to this evening. First of all premising that a long and painful illness had so prostrated Mrs. Hildyard some months before, that she was yet very delicate: consequently the house was kept quiet, and Frances was not going out much.

Frances was the first to enter the drawing-room. Mr. Hildyard was standing before the fire with a gentleman. They both moved as she advanced, and her father, taking her hand, said, "My love, allow me to introduce Lord Winchester. Your lordship sees my youngest daughter, Miss Frances Hildyard."

She saw that he was young, handsome, noble,—she saw that he was courteous beyond any man she had hitherto formed acquaintance with: but she saw not the whole of his fascinations then.

He led Mrs. Hildyard in to dinner, and sat next to her; Frances was on his other hand. The two elder sisters, in their quiet grey silk gowns, sat opposite, and Mr. Hildyard occupied his customary place at the foot of the table. In her white dress and golden ornaments, Frances presented a contrast to her sisters.

Vain girl! She was looking her very best, and she tried to look it. She was conscious that Lord Winchester regarded her with no common admiration. She was used to that; but she was *not* used to this homage from a nobleman.

The secret of his visit was made known later to the family—to no one else. Viscount Winchester, but following the example set him by many another noble viscount, had got himself into a scrape: plainly speaking, he had run headlong into debt, and into the hands of the money-lenders. The respectable old Earl his father, shocked and astonished, had, in the first flush of anger, refused to assist him; and the viscount, threatened with arrest, and not daring to apply to the family solicitor, had flown to Mr. Hildyard, of whom he had some knowledge

Matters could not be arranged in a day. No, nor in a week. They gave more trouble, and were likely to give more, than Mr. Hildyard had anticipated. Meanwhile it was not safe for Lord Winchester to show himself abroad. So here he was located, en famille, in the lawyer's house; and upon Frances chiefly devolved the task of entertaining him.

The old Earl relented, and Lord Winchester was a free man again. He and Frances had become very friendly with each other; it is too early yet to say attached—but the seeds for that were sown. He quitted the house, but not to remain absent from it for ever—now a morning visit was paid, now a friendly dinner taken with them. Neither did it seem anything but a natural occurrence that he should frequently return to his friends, from whom he had received so much kindness. But it needed not his whisperings to Frances, to convince her that she was the magnet that drew him thither, for she saw it in every look, and traced it in every action.

III.

THE winter had come. Frost and snow lay chillingly upon the ground, when one afternoon the visiting carriage of Mrs. Hildyard drew up to her house, and Frances, followed by her mother, leaped lightly out of it. A radiant smile of happiness was on her beautiful face, for a well-known private cab was waiting at the door, giving sure token that its owner was within.

Lord Winchester's visits had been frequent and constant; and oh, the change that had come over the feelings of Frances Hildyard—over her whole life! She had learnt to love; but few could imagine how wildly and passionately.

There he was, as she entered the morning room, striding up and down it impatiently. A hasty greeting, while they were yet uninterrupted, and Lord Winchester walked forward to shake hands with Mrs. Hildyard.

"So, Frances," he whispered, when an opportunity offered, and others were in the room to draw attention from them, "you are tiring already of your conquest?"

Tiring of him! A faint blush upon her pure cheek, and a look of inquiry formed her only answer.

"It was unkind not to reply to my note, when I so earnestly urged it."

"What note?" she asked.

"The one I sent you yesterday."

"I had no letter from you yesterday."

"Think again, my love. James tells me he delivered it as usual into the hands of your own maid."

M. ELLEN EDWARDS J. SWAIN.

AT CHAMOUNI.

"Then she never gave it me," answered Frances, earnestly.

"Some negligence!" ejaculated Lord Winchester.

But the visitors who had been present were leaving, and their conversation was interrupted.

As soon as she was at liberty, Frances hastened to her room, and ringing for her maid, a chattering French girl, demanded if she had not received a note for her on the previous day.

"Most certainly," answered the girl, jabbering on with her false accent, and occasionally introducing a word of her native language. "It came when you were out, mademoiselle, and I placed it here on your toilette-table."

"Then where is it?" inquired Frances.

"Mais—I suppose you had it, mademoiselle," replied the attendant, looking puzzled; and she was beginning to scan the ground, as if thinking it might have fallen there, when Miss Louisa Hildyard entered the apartment, and, of her own accord, dismissed the servant.

"I—I took the liberty, Frances," began Miss Hildyard, clearing her throat, and speaking in the mild, monotonous manner which distinguished her and her sister, "to open a letter yesterday which was addressed to you."

The thoughts of Frances reverted to the lost note, and the impetuous flush of anger rose to her brow. Her answer was delivered in a tone of the utmost astonishment.

"You—opened—a—letter—addressed—to—me!" was her exclamation, with a pause between every word.

"I did," meekly replied Miss Louisa.

"And you presumed—was it from here? Did you find it here?" reiterated Frances, pointing to the dressing-table.

"It was — I did," responded the elder lady, scarcely above a whisper, "and I am now come to converse ——"

But Frances overwhelmed her words with a perfect torrent of indignation. "And how could you—how dared you break the seal of a letter which bore my address?—how dare you presume to stand in my presence and assert it?"

"The superscription was in Viscount Winchester's hand-writing, and the seal bore his crest," was the placid reply. "A sufficient warranty for my proceeding, for I had suspected there was some private understanding between you and him, and deemed it my duty to look into it."

"And don't you know," exclaimed Frances, stamping her foot in her passion, "that the act you have been guilty of is so vile, that, until lately, one committing it was deemed worthy of a felon's death upon the scaffold? That degradation so utter can have been committed by my father's child!"

"This storm of passion and violence is very bad," deplored Miss Louisa Hildyard, crossing her hands upon her chest. "May your mind be brought to habitual meekness!"

"May you be brought to a sense of the shameful act you have stooped to, and keep out of my room for the future!" retorted the exasperated girl; who, truth to say, was looked upon as little better than a heathen by her sisters.

Miss Louisa sighed. "I am but anxious for your best interests, Frances."

"Be so good as attend to your own, and quit my room," said Frances. "And I must request you to return to my maid, whom I will send after you, the letter you have robbed me of."

"It is no longer in my possession," said Miss Louisa, coolly taking a seat, as if in open defiance of her sister's imperious command. "I am in the habit of consulting Sister Mildred, my dear old preceptress at the convent, upon all points, and I submitted Lord Winchester's communication to her by last night's post. Had Viscount Winchester ——"

Frances turned wild. "Had Viscount Winchester come with his future coronet in hand, and laid it at your feet," she vehemently interrupted, "you would have jumped at the offer, unsuitable as you are to him in years. We should have had no covert appeals to Sister Mildred and the convent then."

"Oh, that you had been reared amid the sisterhood!" exclaimed Miss Hildyard. "You would have learnt better than to enter on a clandestine correspondence."

"I wish the sisterhood had been in the sea before they had taught you the trick of opening letters," retorted the young lady, who was in too great a passion to care what heterodox things she gave utterance to. "Why don't you attend to your own pleasures—your week-day masses, and your sick-visitings, and your saintly embroideries, and leave other people alone?"

For the two elder ladies, who were really estimable, and striving to do good in the world, though perhaps rather bigoted and narrow-minded, were rarely seen without some work in their hands, destined for the ornamentation of the convent chapel.

"You know, Frances, that you could never marry Lord Winchester."

"I know that I shall not ask your consent to do it."

"Frances, it could never be. You might as well dream of marrying the—the—person down below, who is not an angel," continued Miss Louisa, striving to put the proposition genteelly, and tapping the floor with her foot, lest Frances should mistake her meaning. "You might as well marry *him*, as a man professing no religion, and reared a Protestant."

The pale face of Frances bore a tinge of red—always a sign in her of deep emotion. She liked not the turn the discussion was taking; for the difference in their creeds had seemed to her the one stumbling-block to her union with Lord Winchester.

"Have you increased my obligations to you, by informing papa that you are a breaker-open of other people's letters?"

"My lips are sealed upon the subject until the arrival of the answer of Sister Mildred," replied Miss Hildyard. "I shall be guided, as I ever am, by her advice."

IV.

THE answer of Sister Mildred was not long in coming. It was a voluminous epistle; pious exortations and scraps of advice being mixed together. The result of it was, that Louisa held a private interview with her father.

Mr. and Mrs. Hildyard were sufficiently confounded with the unwelcome news made known to them. That they were taken with Lord Winchester, as a fascinating man and pleasing companion, could not be denied; but that their greatly-beloved daughter should have become attached to one of an opposite faith, was an overwhelming blow. They might be somewhat lax in observing the duties of their religion, but they were at least true to its tenets. Moreover, Mr. Hildyard had the sense to know that he was not high enough in society's scale for his daughter to be chosen as a wife by the Viscount Winchester. He told Louisa that her fears must have exaggerated the matter—and he thought they had.

But, that same evening, he was disagreeably undeceived. Upon entering the drawing-room after dinner, he found Lord Winchester there. Frances sat at the piano, and his lordship was leaning over her and speaking in whispers. Mrs. Hildyard had dozed off on the sofa; Miss Mary Hildyard sat at the table under the lamp, working at the everlasting embroidery. Altogether, what with the old lady's doze, and the younger one's pre-occupation, the lovers had it pretty much to themselves; and Mr. Hildyard walked across the well-carpeted room without being perceived, in time to see the Viscount touching his daughter's ringlets. Frances started up.

"What do you do, Frances, so far from the fire?" he cried with asperity; the first time in her life she ever remembered harsh tones used to her.

"Is it so cold a night?" inquired the young man.

"Very cold, my lord," was the short reply.

"This room is warm anywhere," observed Frances, as she slowly approached the table where her sister was sitting.

"Shall I sing you your favourite songs to-night, papa?" she inquired, breaking a disagreeable silence.

"No. I am in no mood for singing."

"Will you give me my revenge at chess?" asked the Viscount of Mr. Hildyard.

"If your lordship will excuse me, I shall feel obliged."

So, with this chilling reception, of course his lordship soon went away: and then Mr. Hildyard spoke to Frances.

Kindly and cautiously he pointed out to her how impossible it was that she could ever marry Lord Winchester; partly from the difference of creed, partly from that of position. It was the first objection he enlarged upon; not the last: a proud man—and Mr. Hildyard was that—does not like to dwell on his own inferiority in any way. He told her to choose from the whole world—that he and her mother had but her happiness at heart; but she must choose one of their own faith. "I hope," he continued, "that a mistake has arisen upon this point, and that you do not love Lord Winchester—that it will be no pain to you not to see him again."

Her heart beat tumultuously, and a film gathered before her eyes; but she turned her face, with its agitation, away from view, and gave an evasive answer.

"Because to-morrow I shall write to him," proceeded Mr. Hildyard, "that a stop may be put to this at once, and for ever."

V.

ASTONISHED as Mr. and Mrs. Hildyard may have been, that was nothing compared with the indignant amazement of the Earl when the affair broke upon him. For Mr. Hildyard, not content with writing fully to Lord Winchester, had dropped an explanatory note to the Earl, intimating his hope that the latter would urge upon his son the futility of the expectation that Miss Frances Hildyard could ever become Viscountess Winchester.

That the Viscount admired Frances was beyond a doubt; nay, that he loved her; but that he had entertained any serious thoughts of making her his wife was a mistake. He was not so ready to give up the attractions of bachelorship. He had passed his leisure hours most agreeably by the side of Frances, without any ultimate end in view, and without giving a thought to one. And none could be more sensible than he of the fact that between himself and Miss Frances Hildyard lay a great social gulf. As to any difficulty on the score of religion, he saw it not. Were Miss Frances Hildyard of the Turkish faith, it had been all one to him.

There was commotion in the house when the supercilious letter of the haughty old peer arrived at Mr. Hildyard's. A lawyer's daughter a fit mate for the heir to one of the most ancient earldoms! Had Mr. Hildyard and his wife ever entertained so aspiring a thought, they were now plainly undeceived.

And the letter cruelly mortified Mr. Hildyard. After all he had done for the Viscount! It was just possible that visions had floated in his mind of matters being amicably arranged, of the Viscount's insisting on having her; and he knew that unions between Catholics and

Protestants took place every day, and might take place now: but, with that letter before him! Mr. Hildyard crushed it in his fingers, and rose up, decision in his white and angry face.

All intercourse with Lord Winchester, even but a passing nod, should they meet in public, was interdicted; and Frances, who had never been chidden or crossed, who did not know what control was, had her mother and sisters constantly watching her, night and day.

But their vigilance was sometimes eluded. There were servants in the house who, devoted to Frances's interests or to the Viscount's bribery, frequently passed letters from one to the other, and even contrived to bring about interviews. One unlucky evening, however, that Frances was missing from the sitting-room, her eldest sister went in search of her—suspicion, it may have been, rife in her heart.

Reception-rooms were searched in vain, and she went down to those of the servants, scaring one she met on the road by her unusual appearance there. The housekeeper's parlour was at the end of a passage, and Miss Hildyard advanced to it, turned the handle of the door, and—she did not faint, but sank down upon a chair with a groan. There stood Lord Winchester and Frances; his lordship's arm round her waist, and his lips stealing a kiss from her pretty cheek.

Poor Miss Louisa, modest and retiring, had never in all her life received such a shock. It was enough to turn her hair grey. These things had never been so much as heard of in the convent. She thought the world must be coming to an end.

But Lord Winchester, instead of sinking through the floor with contrition, appeared nowise daunted. He raised his head proudly up, and placing Frances's hand within his arm, demanded of Miss Louisa if she had any commands for him.

This hardihood put the finishing stroke upon Miss Louisa's agitation. She fell into hysterics, and the housekeeper came running in. Amid the confusion Lord Winchester withdrew.

But the scene next day was terrible. The stealthy intrusion, not the first, into his house, the letters which had passed—for the servants were made to confess—quite terrified Mr. Hildyard. Coupled with the fact that Lord Winchester apparently was not seeking Frances for a wife, it gave him a kind of nameless terror. He had Frances before him, his wife and eldest daughter being present.

"Will you," he cried to Frances, after an hour spent in fruitless discussion and recrimination, "will you, or will you not, give up this man?"

"Papa, I cannot," she murmured.

"Frances, do you remember how I and your mother—there she stands—have cherished you? Do you know that you are entwined round our hearts as never child was yet entwined? Will you outrage this affection of years for the sake of a stranger—and he one who is not worthy of you?"

Ah! Mr. and Mrs. Hildyard, you now see the effects of your wofully indulgent training. What response does Frances make? Why, she turns away her head, and makes none.

"Frances, for the last time," continued her father, "will you undertake to renounce all friendship with Viscount Winchester—that he shall be to you henceforth as if you had never met?"

The faint crimson shone in her cheek, and her voice and hands trembled; but she only whispered more firmly the former answer.

"I will never promise it."

But one course lay open, as it appeared to them in their distress—and they took a trusty friend into conclave, as well as the family confessor; a fatherly old man, not often troubled, it must be owned, by the family, except by the two elder daughters of it—one course by which Frances might be saved: that of sending her to the convent. Placed there for a term, she would no doubt be brought to see the error of her wilful ways.

Mrs. Hildyard started at the first shock of the proposition; Mr. Hildyard passed his hand across his brow, as if pain had settled there. They both knew how unfit Frances was for the seclusion and monotony of a convent; how grievously the discipline would try her: and oh, how they loved her still!

But the emotion passed in silence, neither speaking to enter an objection; for in truth they could devise no better mode of dealing with the difficulty. Frances braved it out in her spirit of rebellion. Better be in a convent, she said, than watched at home every moment of the day and night.

But a few days, and she was there. A friend took charge of her, and they travelled post. It was evening when the carriage drew up at the gates. Frances descended from it, and was led through one court-yard after another into the building—which struck her even then with its gloom. Then the doors closed with a bang; and Frances Hildyard was shut out from the world she had so idolised.

PART THE SECOND.

I.

POUR! pour! pour!—Stream! stream! stream!—Hail, rain, snow, wind!—Shake, shiver, drip!—ugh! ogh! igh!

And amidst such a storm as he never hoped to be out in again, did John Rayner, in company with some other diligence passengers, find or swim his way into Lausanne, the diligence itself having been upset and disabled half a mile off. He sought shelter, carpet-bag in hand, in a comfortable-looking, retired hostelrie, where the host attended upon his guests himself, or sent his wife to do so when he was busy.

"A good roaring fire, and a stiff glass of cognac and water, madame," quoth John; "we will talk about dinner afterwards." And, stretching out his legs to the blaze, and sipping the cordial, he speedily regained his equanimity of temper.

What he was doing again in Switzerland, and what took him to Lausanne, is no business of ours. The object of his journey was widely different from that of the agreeable tour of pleasure when he visited the Glacier de Bosson eighteen months before. He was now travelling alone, and expected to be located for two or three weeks at Lausanne —beautiful Lausanne in summer, but a most dreary place in winter.

There was no table-d'hôte in the inn, and he left the dinner to them. It was nicely cooked, and served by the hostess.

"You shall have some creams to-morrow, sir," she observed, placing the dessert. "I could not manage it to-day, for the saints know I have had my share of occupation from sunrise this morning. It is no light matter, sir, to lose a pair of hands in the work of a house."

"You have not lost yours," cried John, looking at those of his hostess.

"But I have lost my daughter's, sir. We have a sick lady stopping in the house, and she has been so much worse the last day or two, that my daughter sits upstairs with her. It is a sad thing to be stricken down with illness in a foreign country, without a friend near."

"It is, indeed," replied the guest. "I trust it will never be your case or mine."

"And she is so beautiful! But the English women mostly are."

"Is it a countrywoman of mine you have been talking of?" he inquired, aroused to sympathy.

"I thought I had said so," answered the hostess. "She was ill when she came, about three weeks ago, and she has been getting worse ever since. Two days past a great change took place; yet, in spite of all we can say or do, she will not see a doctor."

The landlady left the room, and John Rayner sipped his cognac, musing on what he had just heard. Before much time had elapsed, however, back she came; and, drawing forward the chair on the opposite side of the fire, ensconced her portly person in it, with that unconscious familiarity observable on the Continent, and which conveys anything but an idea of presumption or disrespect, as it would be too apt to do in England. Down she sat, with a "Pardon, monsieur," and a stroking and smoothing of her white apron.

"I am taking a great liberty, sir, but I have been conning the matter over with my husband, and we have come to the resolution of asking you to see this sick lady. It would be a terrible thing if she were to die in the house, and without advice, which she *will not* have. We might have the authorities down upon us."

"Very true," answered John, not exactly seeing what the affair had to do with him. "What is her objection to seeing a medical man?"

"What indeed!" grumbled the landlady; "I should like to know what myself. She says she has no need of one, while all the time she is as ill as she can be to be alive. Though young, I should say that she has seen much sorrow.

"What is her name?" inquired John Rayner.

"Madame Eef."

"Madame what?" repeated John.

"Eef," returned the landlady. "It is an English name, that."

"He tried to twist the "Eef" into shape, and could not. Knowing the astounding metamorphosis our names undergo in a French mouth, he let the matter drop.

"Will you not see her, sir, and persuade her to consult a physician? She may listen to you, being an Englishman. I can take you into her room without consulting her, and ——"

"But you surely don't think I could intrude myself into any lady's chamber without her permission?"

"Eh, mercy me!" cried the dame, "then I don't see what's to be done. She must lie there and die."

"What *can* be done?"

"We thought, sir, you might have paid her a friendly visit, as a countryman, asking if you could render her any little service, hearing she was cast down by illness in a remote place. It would be but kindness at any rate."

"Suppose you were to inquire ——"

"It is of no use to inquire," interposed the landlady; "she is very reserved, and will not even hear talk of a stranger. Could you not, sir, say you were a doctor?"

"I am a doctor," interrupted her guest.

"In reality?" exclaimed the dame, looking up.

"In reality," nodded John. "A bonâ fide doctor, with all the et cæteras, and in good practice in my own land."

"Then, sir, you have no plea for refusal. Should you hear of her death in a few days, you will reflect upon yourself for permitting a young countrywoman, almost a girl, to die unaided and uncared for in a foreign inn."

And John Rayner yielded to her argument, and laid aside the cigar-case, which he was upon the point of opening, until after he had paid this strange visit.

The hostess retired, and presently her daughter came for him, requesting him to follow her up-stairs. Passing the bedroom which had been assigned to him, she preceded him down the corridor, and gently opening the door at the end of it, she beckoned to her mother, who was in the room, and retired.

It was a large dreary-looking chamber, dimly lighted by a single candle and the flickering flames of the wood fire. A sofa, covered

with clean white calico, was drawn towards the blaze, and sitting leaning against its pillow was the invalid. He could not see very clearly at first—she looked young and fair, but deathly pale.

The landlady said a few words by way of introduction: they were probably not heard, for she did not look up. But the moment her ear caught the sound of strange footsteps, she turned and started wildly from her seat;—gazing at him, her lips apart, her hands clasped together, and her bosom heaving.

In the dim light of the room, of a greater dimness where he stood in the shade, she may have mistaken him for another.

He began a short explanation—that he was an English medical man—but it was useless to continue any statement or explanation just then. Her whole frame was shaking, her chest and throat were throbbing: they could almost hear her heart beating.

Where had he seen her before—where *had* he seen that beautiful face? For the moment he could not tell, but as he continued to look upon her, a dawning light stole through his mind—a confused reminiscence of this young lady before him, a proud and handsome Englishman, and the glaciers of Switzerland. Then he remembered the episode of the gold pencil-case, and wondered what brought her here alone.

Half an hour afterwards Mr. Rayner was quitting the room. He had made some slight progress; at any rate she was calm, and did not insist upon his leaving her uncared for, as she had done at first. She had even not contradicted him when she heard him say he would see her at a convenient season in the morning.

"How do you find her, sir?" whispered the hostess, meeting him on the staircase.

"She is dying," was the answer. "In a week's time from this I question if she will be alive."

"Eh, mon Dieu!" cried Madame, with a sigh. "On l'a bien pensé."

"Will you direct me to a chemist's?" he inquired.

"My boy, Guillaume, shall show you, sir. Quelle triste chose! quel malheur pour nous! quel malheur qu'elle s'est arrêtée ici!"

II.

THREE evenings afterwards, John Rayner sat by the side of the invalid in the dimly-lighted sick chamber, the one candle upon the table, and the red light shooting up from the wood fire. A wonderful bond of union, considering the short period of their acquaintanceship, had sprung up between them—it deserved the name of friendship, if ever that name was deserved on earth. He knew no more of her history than he knew the first hour he met her, yet he could have cherished and protected her through life; and she could have clung to and confided in him. Not exactly with the feeling that lies between

brother and sister; still less as a lover. A lover! he had left his own sweet wife in his native country; and *she*, this stranger, was too passionately attached to another, too entirely engrossed with his remembrance, to allow even the shadow of such a feeling to enter her imagination. Yet they had become dear friends; and he could have laid her aching head upon his breast, and striven to soothe away her anguish.

Is it not strange that these feelings ——. However, let all that pass.

"Are you acquainted," she suddenly asked, turning upon him for a moment her brilliantly blue eyes, though their brilliancy had now its origin in fever, "with the London Inns of Court?"

"Quite well."

"Then you may know the legal firm of Hildyard and Prael?"

"Who does not? Their names are eminent."

"Mr. Hildyard is my father," she whispered, bending down her head on the arm of the sofa, so that he could not see her face.

"Mr. Hildyard!"

"Even so. I was—I *am* Miss Hildyard."

Yet the wedding-ring and keeper were on her finger. False, deceiving rings!—false, deceptive, worthless baubles! She saw his involuntary glance at them, and her head was bent lower. And John Rayner, for that rebellious glance, could almost have bandaged his eyes. Whatever may have been her errors, it was not in his duty, no, nor in his nature, to chastise her for them.

"I know Mr. Hildyard slightly," he resumed.

"Have you met him lately?—how does he seem?—when did you last see him?" she reiterated, looking up with painful earnestness.

And then the doctor recalled a fact which had escaped his memory, and he felt the hot blood rush to his face. Mr. Hildyard was dead: he had died about six months before. Should he tell her? No.

He relinquished the hand which he had taken, and rose hastily to snuff the candle, for her eyes were still raised to his face, and the tell-tale colour was there.

"What dreadful snuffers these are! If they would but import a few English ones into these remote places!"

"But my father?" she interrupted, beseechingly.

"I am trying to recollect," he replied, with apparent indifference, as he resumed his place. "I do not think I have seen Mr. Hildyard lately. But I am not much in the habit of seeing him; my residence is in so different a part of the town: as I have told you."

"My dear, dear father!" she uttered. "What would I not give to see him once again!"

Quietly and persuasively John Rayner got her to speak of her past life. There was full confidence between them now. The act of placing her in the convent was a terrible trial to her, even yet. Or, rather, its reminiscence.

"I cannot describe what it was to me," panted Frances, emotion stirring her; and her breath was laboured and heavy, as is often the case with one drawing near the grave. "I had been reared in the luxuries of life, accustomed to its elegances and gaieties, and they tore all from me and shut me up in a bare, gloomy prison. I could but compare it to a house of death. Do you suppose I felt the change?"

"A convent is represented to the uninitiated as a peaceful asylum," said John Rayner, thinking to soothe her.

"Peaceful asylum! there are some who give that name to the grave—they have no more tried the one than they have the other. I have experienced the former, I am close upon the latter; and I can only pray that there may be no analogy between them."

"Yet there are hundreds of women who voluntarily embrace the seclusion of a convent, and live and die in it?"

"Hundreds of *girls;* but for the women, could you count them by tens? And you call it willingly—you, with your keen penetration and your sound intellect. Well—yes," she added after a pause, "they do enter willingly for the most part; and they find out afterwards what they have done. When girls have been trained in a convent, then, I grant you, they may find pleasure in its peaceful monotony. Look at my two sisters"—with a flash of the old spirit. "What are they? little better than living mummies. They are just about as fit for the world as I was for the convent."

"They had been reared in one, and you in the other, you see."

"Just so. It all lies in the training. The convent has its good side of course, but I was not fitted for it. I was particularly *un*fitted for it; and the one of which I speak is, of all convents I ever heard of, the most strict and severe in its discipline and rules. I am not speaking against these religious orders generally, you understand," she added more quickly; "I should be untrue to my faith if I did; only, the change acted badly on *me*. Collectively, I revere them."

"Your friends placed you there with the best of views, I feel sure," said Mr Rayner. "That you might acquire peace and resignation."

"True. But they made a wide mistake. Unfortunately for their views, perhaps also for me, I was too firmly wedded to the world's ties."

"And therefore the monotony was irksome."

"That is not the right word: it implies something that may be borne. Things in themselves were not so very terrible: only they appeared so to me. Many a girl might have got along: but not one reared as I had been. Think what it was! Torn from a London life of gaiety, from a whirl of pleasure, at home and out, in which my very heart was wrapt, which was to me as a very Paradise; torn suddenly from all this, and flung into what seemed to me a living tomb. Heaven forgive me! I know I think of it too harshly—that I was too rebellious then."

"It must have been a bitter trial for you," he murmured.

"One great, vast trial on the whole, and innumerable petty little trials intermixed. *They* galled me most: and of course you must see that my spirit was in a wickedly rebellious state. I suppose that is the true word for it—wicked. Every little cherished taste and prejudice of my past time was thwarted there. I was attired in the most simple manner when I went down—a plain black-silk dress and a white muslin collar; but these could not be allowed in the convent. They were taken from me before I had been ten minutes in the place; before they gave me any refreshment, or allowed me time to repose. A gown of black stuff or serge, looking just like some of the aprons worn by the inferior servants in my father's establishment, was brought to me by a nun. I was very obedient, and took off the silk dress as she required; but upon going to resume the collar—for I did not then know her interdiction extended to that—she raised a pair of scissors that hung at her girdle and deliberately cut it in two."

"'Then I am not to wear it?' I exclaimed.

"'It is a vain ornament,' she said, 'and may have no place here.'

"'And those in my boxes—are they to be served the same?'

"'Your boxes will be examined before they are given up to you,' was her reply, 'and all improper articles removed.'

"My high spirit rose within me; but I checked it, perhaps for the first time in my life. She desired me to take a seat, and proceeded to remove the combs from my hair. I started up then, and indignantly remonstrated. I thought she was about to cut it off.

"'Not so,' she answered, gathering the long curls in her hands, I am but going to arrange it in the mode permitted here.'

"I wish you could have seen me in this black coarse dress—coarse compared with what I had been accustomed to—fitting tightly to the shape, and closing high round the throat; not a bit of anything white lace, or embroidery, to be seen about me, and all my hair combed to the back of my head and tied up in a knot! But this was nothing; nay, I do think it was more a joke to me than anything else—a joke, mind you, if it had not been to last."

"But," exclaimed John Rayner, who had listened in astonishment, "I suppose you had entered as a boarder."

"I did enter as one."

"Then why this change in your attire?"

"You may well ask. It was Louisa's doing—my well-meaning, but most ill-judging eldest sister. I did not think so then: I know it now. My father and mother knew nothing of the dreadful discipline I was subjected to; I am sure of it; Louisa arranged it all. She wrote to the authorities in the convent and urged it upon them. I was to be almost as a nun. A nun! Fancy that, for a girl of the gay world."

"And your duties?"

"Do not talk of them," she answered; "they were to me intolerable

labour and privation. The sisterhood pursued them with monotonous contentment; inured to them by habit, they found their satisfaction in them: but I ——"

She appeared to be getting exhausted. John Rayner advanced to the table; and, pouring out some drops, administered them to her in water.

"The mornings, when I went there, were cold and dark," she resumed, "and we had to rise without fire, and be in the chapel at five. At seven there was a scanty breakfast; at nine the chapel again; and after that we were dismissed to our cells to pray and meditate."

"Neither of which was performed by you, I conclude?" cried John, taking her emaciated hand, and unconsciously twirling round and round those false rings.

"But they were. I meditated on my bitter fate; on my sister's cruelty, for *she* knew what she was consigning me to, and by that time I had learnt to suspect it. I meditated upon how to escape. I yearned for home; I yearned for the world I had left behind; and, more than all, I yearned for the presence of one who had become more to me than home and friends. And when I prayed, as they ordered me, I prayed that I might be released from their unnatural trammels, or be removed by death."

"But you were speaking of your duties."

"Why go into the details?" she rejoined. "I dislike ever to think of them. One day was but a repetition of another, one hour almost the counterpart of the preceding one; the early rising, the continual prayers and services, and the self-same daily routine. We dined at twelve—such a dinner! I had used to wonder if the lady abbess had not a second one served in her own apartment. Herbs, vegetables, a small portion of meat, or fish, or an egg, and spring-water, may be good for the health, but I had been accustomed to more generous food. Afterwards came the chapel again, and then we had to appear before the lady abbess, *on our knees*, and give an account of our actions, dispositions, and thoughts during the past twenty-four hours. I must have tried her patience frequently; but that she was very kind to me, and endeavoured to win me over gently, I will not deny. A rebellious inmate was, I suppose, unknown in the convent; or, if any one rebelled in spirit, she perhaps concealed it better than I did. It peeped out in spite of me, and I was mildly and continually remonstrated with. I daresay the nuns, regarding themselves as travellers to Heaven, looked upon me as the sailors of old looked upon Jonah. If they could but have read the real rebellion that was searing my heart!"

"Shall I give you more drops?"

"Not now. For recreation we were allowed to do needlework; mending our own clothes, or working fine lace for the adornment of

the chapel. Work of all kinds I hated; I had never done any. There was no break to the painful monotony of my existence. I was not allowed to see the boarders. Whether the nuns thought I should infect them with my worldly spirit, or that they would wean my attention from religious exercises, I cannot say, but we did not meet. At eight o'clock in the evening we were consigned to our dark and lonely cells, and might go to bed or remain up, praying, as we chose. I frequently remained, not praying, but thinking of the scenes of gaiety I had used to enter about that hour—and that *he* was entering on them then—the lighted ball-rooms, the sweet music, the perfume of the flowers, and the radiant faces we were wont to meet. And, oh! the continual confessions! I who had nothing to confess but my painful regrets and the bitter feeling that was eating away my life! Can you imagine what it was for me?" she broke off to ask, in a tone of passionate pain.

"Only too well."

"I do not seek to excuse myself. I know how bitterly rebellious I was; that I did not even try to make the best of things: but I should like you to see that I was sinned against as well as sinning."

"Did you never write home?"

"Frequently. I am coming to that. I described minutely to my father and mother how I had to live; they would know better than words of mine could tell them that I was entirely unfitted for it. I humbled myself to them; I promised that if they would release me, and receive me at home again, I would be all they could wish. At length I offered to give up Lord Winchester; never to see or speak to him again; and they knew that, if I undertook this in all honour, I would have fulfilled it. I was suffering all this because I would not give that promise when they asked for it: for a promise once made by me is never broken."

"Did they relent?"

"*I never had an answer.* I wrote to my father, to my mother, to my sisters, but never did a single line or word come to me in return. I at last wrote, in the very extremity of despair, frequent, frequent letters; the lady abbess told me I wrote too often, and interdicted it."

"Were the letters sent?" inquired John Rayner.

"I cannot tell you; I do not know; but I had no suspicion then that they were not; otherwise—oh!" she broke off suddenly, pressing her hand upon her brow in anguish, "whoever played me false in this has much to answer for. It was one of two things: either the letters were not sent by Lousia's orders; or else they were all sent to her and she suppressed them. It was all, all her doing. The nuns, I am sure, were kind and good, but they no doubt had their orders from her —and they thought to save my soul. I did not suspect Louisa's treachery then. I thought my father and mother had abandoned me.

I thought I was consigned to that place for life; and in my despair, I really prayed to die."

"Be calm, be calm, Miss Hildyard."

"I grew ill, and was removed to the infirmary, and—and—I cannot explain to you how, and you must never ask me, but I effected my escape from the convent."

He uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"You may well wonder. Such a thing had never, I believe, occurred there before, and probably never will occur again."

"But how could you effect it?"

"It was one of the inmates who assisted me, and for her sake my lips are sealed."

"Surely it was not a nun?"

"Oh, no. It was one who saw my despair and learnt to love and pity me. A tender-hearted woman; a helper in the domestic work of the convent, and who had helped to nurse me. There! I have said too much."

"And you bribed her?"

"I had nothing to bribe with. The bribery was but genuine pity of her heart. She had a daughter once who died, and she loved me because she thought I resembled her. Still I do not think she would have ever aided me, had it not been that she feared ——"

"Go on, Miss Hildyard."

"I had paroxysms—dreadful paroxysms of despair, and I believe she feared I might lay violent hands upon myself. But I never should have done that, unless insanity had overtaken me. It was in the grey light of early morning that I escaped. I pointed to the world before me, and pressed *her* to fly with me; but she shook her head, and said if I indeed thought I owed her a recompense, to offer up unceasing prayers that she might be forgiven for this act."

"What became of you? Whither did you go?"

The invalid flung her wasted hands over her face. "This is the most cruel confession to make of all," she whispered. "But—oh! don't blame me more than you can help. Remember that I thought home was, of all places, barred to me: that my appearance there would only lead to my being replaced in the convent under more astringent rules. I was helpless, foodless, almost clotheless; my heart was nearly bursting with indignation and perplexity, and——I wrote to Lord Winchester."

There was a deep silence. John Rayner did not break it.

"I ran miles, it seemed to me, away from the convent, over cross-country roads: a few people that I met stared at me until all my limbs trembled with terror, for I feared they might divine who I was. I looked strange, no doubt, for I had only a shawl pinned over my head."

"But where did you find shelter?"

"I came suddenly upon a mill; I was in a retired lane, and the hedges had hid it from my view. Adjoining it was a cottage, and, seated on a bench at the door was a young woman, tossing and playing with a child. She gave me good-morrow kindly. I knew I could not go much further, and I was afraid of being pursued, so I mustered up resolution, and asked her to take me in."

"Did you say you came from the convent?"

"No, no. I told a tale of a cruel stepmother—I had been conning it over as I went along. I said I had run away from home, and wanted shelter somewhere for a day or two. She said she would afford it me; that the mill and cottage were so retired that sometimes a stranger would not be seen passing for weeks together, and that I could sleep with her and the baby, for her husband was gone to a distant cattle-show, and would not be back for three or four days. I wrote the letter that afternoon, and took it to the village myself in the dusk of the evening, and posted it."

"And he, to whom you wrote, came?" interposed John, in a low voice.

"He came. He prayed me to abandon those who had abandoned me, and to trust to his honour; and I left the cottage with him."

Again there was an unbroken pause, disturbed only by her irregular breathing, as she panted for respiration. John Rayner did not know what to say, or how to break it.

"Finish your recital another day," he whispered, as he leaned over her, and smoothed the pillows that were her support.

"I must finish it now," she answered, "if I am to finish it at all. I dare say you cannot think worse of me than you have already thought."

"I have never thought ill of you," he exclaimed, with his characteristic impetuosity. "I do not, I will not think ill of you; and were we both free ——"

Whatever nonsense he was going to utter, I declare he does not choose to recall unto this day. But she interrupted him.

"Hear the rest while I have strength to tell it. We fled night and day, never halting for rest, and scarcely for refreshment, until we reached Paris. That same evening an English Catholic clergyman, in his canonicals, was introduced to the hotel, and went through the marriage ceremony."

"But, good heavens! my dear, dear young lady," ejaculated, Mr. Rayner, starting up and striding backwards and forwards across the room, "could you, with even your partial knowledge of the world—could you for a moment believe that such a marriage was a binding one?"

"I am but a few days, it may be hours, removed from the grave," she murmured, "and I will not go down to it with a falsehood on my lips—not even to purchase a tithe of good opinion from you. I *felt*

that the marriage might be a false one; that perhaps it was not legally good: at least, as regarded him, a Protestant. Even now I am not quite sure, one way or the other. The Priest blundered at parts of the service: it has struck me since that possibly he was not a priest at all."

"There would have been time for you to retreat, even then."

"There would, there would. But I should have gone down then in the world's opinion. And you do not know what it is to feel that you are thrust from your father's home; that you possess no refuge in the wide world, and to have one by your side persuading you to trust to him, one whom you worship almost to idolatry, as I did him. Besides, in spite of the latent doubt, I did believe in the marriage: sometimes I believe in it still. My imprudence was lamentable, my thoughtlessness great—yet do not shrink from me."

He drew her aching head towards him, and bathed her beating temples with cooling water.

"There is little more to tell that you may not imagine. We travelled rapidly through France, and lingered in Switzerland; you saw us at the Glaciers. That was my happy time; if I can say that one hour has been truly happy since I was sent out of my father's house."

A pause. The tears were coursing down her pale cheeks.

"We passed on to Italy in October," she resumed, "and remained there the winter. In the spring we returned to Switzerland, and lived in seclusion in one of those beautiful little villas on the border of Geneva's lake. We had travelled under the name of Heath, and I still retain it; it did as well as any other—Mr. and Mrs. Heath."

The Madame Eef of the landlady was explained.

"And now commenced my punishment. He had long shown symptoms of ennui and indifference, and ere the green of the spring had well given place to the blossoms of summer, he left. It was but twelve months since the period of our marriage in Paris—and that was the duration of his vaunted love."

"Be calm, Miss Hildyard, for your own sake."

"He said he should return shortly. But I doubted him, and the terrible sickness of despair took hold of my heart. Let no one talk of man's faithlessness until they are deserted as I have been."

"Have you seen him since?"

"No—never. A few letters, affectionate at first, but growing gradually cold, as his love had done, are all the notice I had from him."

"You bore it in silence—you did not follow him?"

"Do you think I would follow one who wilfully estranges himself? I lingered on alone in my never-to-be-told-of anguish—yielding to my breaking heart—yielding to this disease which attacked and is now killing me. I left the house I was in near Geneva, ever restless, ever anxious, and willing to find a more obscure place to die in. I did not

mean to stay in this little inn, but my pain and weakness increased greatly after I came to it, and all exertion seemed to have left me."

"Your disease would have been successfully grappled with if taken in time."

"That is very probable. But what have I left to live for?"

"Life might not always have been the blank for you that it is now. Lord Winchester——"

"It could have been nothing else—nothing but one continuous scene of bitter feeling," she interrupted. "He was in haste to fly to another idol."

Pulling open the drawer of the table, she took from it a torn piece of newspaper. "They told you that two days before you came I was taken worse?" she resumed.

"The landlady said so—alarmingly worse."

"It was excitement that did it. Ah! such excitement. In the evening of that day I was sitting here, all alone, when Lucie brought me some baked apples. They were very hot, just taken out of the oven, and her mother had doubled a piece of newspaper and placed it between the saucer and the waiter. In lingering over one of them, trying to eat it, my eyes fell upon the paper, and I saw that it was English. It was a copy of *Galignani's*, and of recent date. Lucie said a traveller had left it when he quitted the inn that morning. It was as well to look at that as to sit brooding over my gloomy thoughts, and I took it from under the saucer."

She put the paper into John Rayner's hand, pointing slightly to one part of it. He read the paragraph, which was written in that inflated style peculiar to newspapers:

"It is said that preliminaries for a marriage are being arranged between Viscount Winchester and the lovely and accomplished Lady Frances Gaiton, only daughter of the Earl and Countess of Gaiton. Both families are sojourning in the French capital."

John Rayner folded up the scrap of paper and returned it to her, making no comment. What could he make?

"Her name is Frances, too!" she murmured, as if communing with herself.

"But, three parts of their newspaper stories are utter inventions," he exclaimed. "This may be so."

"And is, so far as the announcement of the marriage goes. He would not dare that while I live. But he no doubt loves her."

III.

THE days passed on—but a few days—when one morning John Rayner was awoke by a bustle and commotion in the house. He opened his

room door, and saw Lucie passing in tears – Frances Hildyard was drawing near to death; or Frances Winchester, whichever it might be.

With what haste he could he entered her chamber; but nothing more could be done for her in this world. The landlady drew him away almost immediately. She had sent for a priest to shrive the penitent, and he was even then coming up.

"Monsieur le Curé is a good man," said the landlady. "He dined with us last Easter Sunday."

A ray of the afternoon sun fell on the bed when John Rayner entered the room for the last time. She opened her eyes as he bent over her.

"A few moments alone with you," she whispered. And John sent the landlady away, and closed the door.

"You have been very good to me, Mr. Rayner."

"What can I do for you?" he inquired.

"Nothing more for me. But upon your return to England, call upon my father and mother, and if, *as I now believe*, they never received those letters, tell them about me. But say nothing against *him*," she continued, convulsively pressing John's hands; "nothing, nothing against him. Let them not think I have been unhappy—or—deserted. It is the disease that has killed me: they said I should be liable to it."

The faint flush of excitement lighted up her cheek, and her hands shook with emotion as they lay in his. He saw how it was, and passed his word: there was no help for it.

"The promises to the dying are held sacred," she whispered.

"And Lord Winchester—shall I say aught if I ever meet him?"

"Not a word—not a syllable," she answered almost fiercely. "He does not cast a thought towards me in life, therefore it is scarcely probable a regret would follow me in death."

"Have you no further message for your mother?"

She turned her face to the wall, and for some moments he saw it not. "Tell them I have repented of all, and that I trust Heaven has forgiven me my sins, as I hope they will forgive. Tell them, that if life had been granted me, *and I could have redeemed the past*, I would that I had been as readily welcomed to their hearts again as I was when a little child. And tell them that God has taken me in mercy, for my clouded life would have been spent in yearnings and regrets."

She was buried near Lausanne. And John Rayner, upon the conclusion of the business that took him to Switzerland, left for England.

The clocks were striking twelve, and the day was sunny, when Mr. Rayner knocked at the door of Mrs. Hildyard.

Two plain women, dressed in deep mourning, were in the drawing-room. He had no difficulty in recognizing them to be the elder sisters of Frances. They heard what he had to say with indifference—at least it appeared so to him, though it may have been but their coldness

of manner. They inquired whether Lord Winchester was with her to the last,—which proved that they knew, at least, somewhat of the past, —and a little put out Mr. Rayner. He was not to have spoken of Lord Winchester.

"Pray spare me, madam," was his answer. "I will tell you all I know of your sister, but upon Lord Winchester and his conduct I cannot enter."

"Do you wish to spare him?"

"Madam, I should like to see him horsewhipped."

"Frances need not have cautioned you," were Miss Hildyard's next words, delivered with all sadness of a subdued spirit; "for that is what I suppose she did. Our father is no longer here to feel indignation or resent insult; our mother is broken-hearted, and fast hastening to her grave; and we are two lone women, whose path in life has been fearfully clouded by her who is no more, and whose vengeance, even had we power and will to wreak it, would fall harmless upon the head of one so high in the world's favour as is Lord Winchester."

"Frances prayed for him in dying," answered John Rayner.

"May our minds, when this new pang shall have passed, be brought into the like Christian state!" they answered, bowing stiffly. And what with the exceeding stiffness of all around him, and the disagreeable nature of the task he had undertaken, John was right glad when the interview was over. As to questioning the two reserved and self-contained ladies on the subject of the letters written at the convent, John found he might as well have held his tongue. They only shook their heads and knew "nothing."

Two days afterwards he read her death in the *Times*. "Frances Theresa, youngest daughter of the late Richard Hildyard, Esquire."

It was on a lovely day in spring that John Rayner chanced to be near one of the fashionable west-end churches. A bridal party was coming out of it, all glitter and noise and white satin favours. A crowd had gathered to gaze at the finery, and he stood afar off to gaze also.

In the foremost carriage sat the young man with the well-remembered face that he had once seen by the source of the Arveyron at Chamouni —Lord Winchester. Singularly attractive John had thought him then; singularly so did he think him now. By his side sat a beautiful girl, until that morning Lady Frances Gaiton, now his bride: but not so beautiful as that other girl, lying in her lonely grave, away from home and kindred.

"I don't wish *you* ill, Lady Winchester," thought John as the carriage passed him, "but it is another who ought to have sat there. And *he* best knows how much and how little wrong he did her. I hope his conscience pricks him!"

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The Argosy

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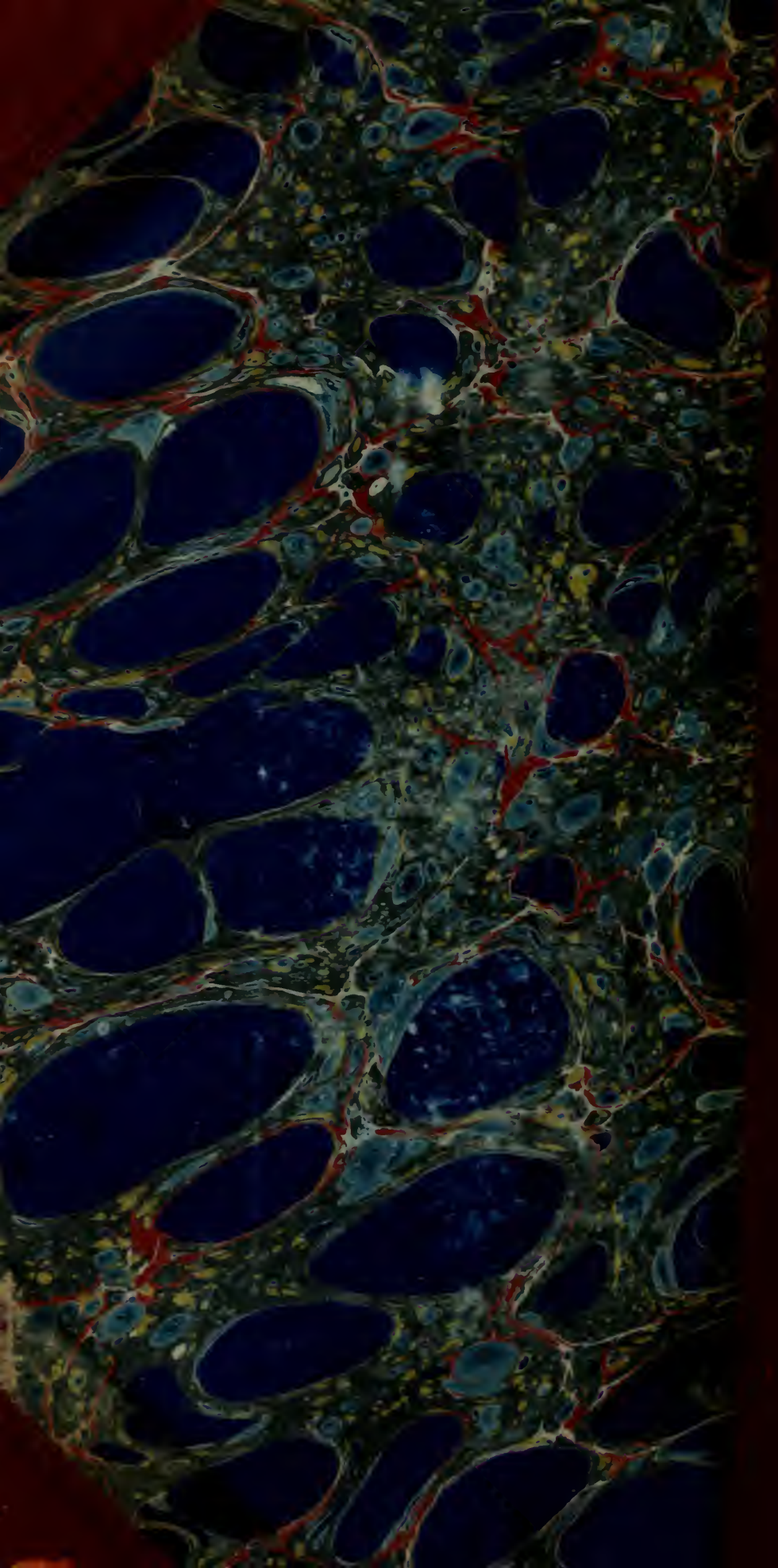
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